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NOVA SCOTIA

Canada's Seacoast

A GUIDE TO STARTING AND OPERATING A

Local Visitor Information Centre

NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism Partnership

NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism, Culture and Heritage

106-02524/

A Guide to Starting and Operating a Local Visitor Information Centre in Nova Scotia

Prepared by:

THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada
Halifax, Nova Scotia

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Manual

This is one of a series of tourism development manuals commissioned by the Tourism Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage to assist Nova Scotians in the establishment of tourism businesses and in planning for the delivery of tourism services in the province. This manual deals with the establishment and operation of a local Visitor Information Centre. There are other manuals that deal with establishing different kinds of tourism businesses such as an accommodation property, a campground, a local sightseeing tour operator, a restaurant, a tourism retail business, an adventure tourism operation and a receptive tour operator. There are also manuals on how to plan for, develop and market tourism in your community, on establishing an attraction and on marketing for tourism businesses. The manuals were originally prepared in 1996 and 1999 and were updated in 2005. A new manual on community festivals and events was also prepared in 2005.

The purpose of this manual is to provide you with some of the information necessary in improving, operating and establishing a Visitor Information Centre in Nova Scotia. It should be noted that this information is a guide only.

It is strongly suggested that the reader undertake efforts to verify any information on which their business plan is based and not rely solely on the information in this manual. There are areas where you may want to consider retaining the appropriate professional expertise to assist you. While the information contained in this manual is believed to be accurate, as of the Winter of 2005, it is not so warranted. The reader should note that federal, provincial and municipal regulations, taxes, etc. change frequently and it is recommended that you check with the appropriate authorities, listed in Appendix II, including representatives of the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and your local Business Service Centre (on line www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr or at Access Nova Scotia centres around the province), to obtain up-to-date information on these matters.

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1.2 Contents of the Manual

This manual provides information and advice on a variety of topics which will be important in understanding the requirements for success in the operation, planning and development of a local Visitor Information Centre. Throughout this manual, we have referred to these facilities as Local Visitor Information Centres or VICs.

The following topics are covered in the manual:

- Visitor Information Centres in Nova Scotia;
- Requirements for success;
- Planning for operations;
- Organization;
- Funding the operation of the centre;
- Development planning for a Visitor Information Centre;
- Design;
- Legal, regulatory, and tax matters;
- The future.

Appendices at the back of the manual cover the following:

- Job descriptions for a provincial travel counsellor;
- List of contacts;
- Standards and Certification.

SECTION 2

Visitor Information Centres in Nova Scotia

SECTION 2

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES IN NOVA SCOTIA

2.1 The Present System

Visitor information in Nova Scotia is provided through a number of different types of services, including:

- Provincial Visitor Information Centres;

- Local Visitor Information Centres or Tourist Bureaus operated by various local organizations and business associations;

- Check In, which provides information and reservation services over the telephone, and also handles requests for reservations and literature which are received through Nova Scotia's provincial tourism web site (www.novascotia.com);

- Facilities such as attractions, accommodations, campgrounds, restaurants, and gas stations which provide varying amounts of visitor information.

Provincial Visitor Information Centres

The province of Nova Scotia, through the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, operates provincial Visitor Information Centres at the entry points to the province (Amherst, Yarmouth, Digby, Pictou, and the Halifax International Airport), at three locations within the province (downtown Halifax, Peggy's Cove and Port Hastings), on board the ferries travelling to Nova Scotia from New Brunswick and PEI and at land-based centres in Bar Harbor and Portland, Maine.

Most of these provincial Visitor Information Centres are open seasonally, generally from mid-May through mid-October. Some are open year round.

Provincial Visitor Information Centres provide a wide variety of brochures, maps and printed information, as well as posters and displays, on things to see and do in all parts of Nova Scotia. Travel counsellors at these centres can provide information and directions, make accommodation reservations through the Check In reservations system and help with basic information such as ferry schedules, the location of banks, service stations, restaurants, and so on.

The Tourism Division. Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage is also responsible for the operation of the Travel Literature Distribution Centre which distributes provincial, regional, and private sector brochures, maps, and information pieces to provincial and local Visitor Information Centres around the province.

Local Visitor Information Centres (VICs)

There are approximately 83 local Visitor Information Centres located in communities around Nova Scotia. These are operated by a variety of organizations including Regional Tourism Associations (RTIAs), Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, local business associations, municipalities, and local historical societies. These centres provide information on the local and regional area, in addition to information on the province as a whole, to those who walk into the bureau. Some centres also provide information over the phone, by email, by fax and/or by mail.

Most local VICs are located in separate buildings provided by their sponsoring organizations. Some centres share facilities with other visitor services or attractions, such as museums or historic sites.

There are no restrictions on who can operate or establish a local VIC, and the province does not assume operational responsibility for any locally sponsored VICs. However, a Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality Program has been established by the Tourism Division and there are a number of significant benefits associated with becoming an "Award of Quality Visitor Information Centre."

Check In

Check In is an Information and Reservation Service operated on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. Check In has a toll-free phone service from anywhere in North America. Callers requesting information on Nova Scotia can receive the information on the phone or by mail. Check In also makes accommodation reservations for callers, at accommodation properties which are Check In members. They also handle requests for reservations and information coming in from the province's tourism website. Many accommodation properties in Nova Scotia are members of Check In. These properties pay a commission to Check In for any reservations obtained through this service.

Other Information Services

Many of the facilities that service visitors provide brochures and other literature on Nova Scotia. For example, many of the museums and historic attractions in the province display brochures, as do many of the fixed roof accommodations and campgrounds, gas stations, etc. The regional tourism associations also respond to telephone, email and mail enquiries for visitor information.

Front-line staff at many establishments, including accommodations, restaurants, gas stations and stores, also provide information to visitors. As well, Nova Scotian residents are frequently sources of information on things to do and see in the province.

With the rapid growth in the use of the web to research travel destinations, many potential visitors to Nova Scotia now use this medium as a prime source for information on the province. Then, once they are here, they supplement their on-line research findings with visits to information centres for more in-depth information and suggestions for things to do while they are travelling in the province.

2.2 The Markets for Visitor Information Centres

Anyone who is looking for information on things to see and do and anyone who is a visitor to the area represents a market for Visitor Information Centres. Thus, the markets for VICs include:

- Visitors to the community, either from the surrounding region, from other parts of Nova Scotia, or from outside the province;
- Residents of the community looking for information on things to see and do in the area or elsewhere in the province, either for themselves or for friends and relatives. Local residents sometimes also use information centres to get information on other provinces.
- Local businesses which need information to give to their customers who are visitors to the area;
- Travel agents and tour operators who are planning trips to Nova Scotia.

The number of people travelling around Nova Scotia each year is substantial. In 2005, there were approximately 2.2 million visitors from outside the province with some 1.5 million of them coming between May and October. As well, Nova Scotians make almost 6 million trips (including both same-day and overnight trips) around the province each year.

The 2000 Visitor Exit Survey asked visitors if they have visited a VIC during their trip to Nova Scotia. 21% of visitors indicated they went to a VIC to get information when they first entered the province and 23% visited a VIC while travelling through the province. On average, visitors who went to VICs paid 2.2 visits to a VIC while in the province. Visitors from International markets (US and overseas) were the most likely to visit a VIC, with 44% indicating they stopped when they first entered the province and 48% stopping while travelling through the province. Visitors from other parts of Atlantic Canada were least likely to stop at a VIC.

However, research also indicates that almost 74% of VIC users obtain information prior to leaving home and 61% indicated that they had used the Internet for information on Nova Scotia before leaving on their trip.

2.3 The Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council

The Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council (TPC) is an industry and government partnership that shares in planning and decision making for tourism marketing, research and product development in Nova Scotia. The TPC works with industry stakeholders to realize Nova Scotia's potential as a world class four season destination. It was established following a 1996 Tourism Strategy for Nova Scotia that, among other things, called for a true partnership between the tourism industry and government in everything from marketing to research and tourism development.

The Council consists of 16 members, 14 of whom are tourism industry leaders, managers and business owners. Members of the TPC are selected through an industry call for applications. They must be owners, operators or senior managers of tourism related businesses, and consideration is given to various other criteria, in the selection of members.

The TPC has three core committees - an Executive Committee, a Long-Term Integrated Planning Committee and a Short-Term Integrated Planning Committee.

The TPC oversees the development of the Tourism Plan annually which is presented to the industry at TIANS fall tourism conference. The Council is also involved in a wide variety of other programs and initiatives. Visit their website at www.nstpc.com for up-to-date information.

2.4 Nova Scotia's Vison for Tourism - Challenging Ourselves

"100% Tourism Revenue Growth by 2012"

The Tourism Partnership Council's Vision Committee spent two years (2000-2002) developing a process to create a Vision for Nova Scotia's Tourism industry. The Committee looked at issues that the tourism sector could influence or change that would help to create growth and improve industry performance. After a process that included industry workshops and consultations, 11 Vision recommendations were identified for implementation.

These recommendations cover product development, environment, the administration of tourism, marketing, technology, quality, human resources, transportation and research. Responsibility for leading the implementation of the recommendations has been divided between the Tourism Partnership Council, TIANS and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. For up-to-date information on the implementation of Nova Scotia's Vision for Tourism, check the Tourism Vision section of the TPC's website (www.nstpc.com and select Tourism Vision from the menu bar).

The Tourism Vision is a catalyst to assist Nova Scotia's tourism industry to evolve and grow. It is not cast in stone and is an "unfolding process". Achieving the Vision will require change - by all tourism stakeholders including individual businesses - in how tourism is managed and delivered in Nova Scotia so as to improve quality and generate increased tourism revenues.

Success will be measured "not only by growth in revenues but our ability to work together, maintain our culture and authentic character, develop new markets and products, attract new visitors and improve the recognition of our sector's contributions to our province and various levels of government".

For more information on how you can be involved in the Vision for Tourism, visit www.nstpc.com

2.5 Nova Scotia's Visitor Information Services Strategy

The Visitor Information Services Strategy (December 2003) was prepared by a committee of the Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council and is designed to integrate all aspects of visitor information services and to be a key part of the process of achieving the Vision for Tourism described above.

The Visitor Information Services (VIS) Strategy is provided in Appendix IV. The strategy provided overall directions for the future of visitor information services in Nova Scotia. The Visitor Information Services strategy encompasses all aspects of information and selling the destination - including the Travel Guide, the web-site, Check In reservations and information system, and VICs as well as all staff who are prepared to sell the province to the world, both before and after they arrive in Nova Scotia.

Fundamental to the strategy is the fact that Visitor Information Services are a vital part of the marketing program and that they must "develop a selling emphasis, recommending what visitors want not just providing information". This requires a willingness to be forward looking, market-driven and to do things differently. It also requires more emphasis on training to ensure that VIS counsellors have the skills needed to sell the province and encourage longer and return visits.

The Strategy is expected to result in a shift in focus away from the Visitor Information Centre given the fact that most visitors to the province obtain information (mostly from the Internet) prior to leaving home for their trip. However, it does recommend support for locally operated VICs including such things as support through the Provincial Employment Program, literature distribution to local VICs, training assistance where applicable and extending the reach of visitor servicing through literature kiosks at traditional and non-traditional locations.

If you are planning a Visitor Information Centre, you should obtain up-to-date information on the Visitor Information Services Strategy (from the Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council and/or the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage) and its implementation before proceeding with your plans since there may be implications for your project.

2.6 Market Trends and Consumer Expectations

If you are going to operate a Visitor Information Centre, it is important that you have some knowledge about visitor markets and about trends in these markets. What are today's travellers looking for? What are they likely to want to see or do? What are their expectations about service and value? The points below highlight some of the major trends which are being experienced in our society and the implications of these trends on the travel and tourism industry.

- The population composition of North America is changing, largely due to the *aging of the baby boom generation* and the resultant growth in the mature population. These baby boomers are wealthy and seeking new experiences, but are less inclined to rough it. They are interested in cultural and heritage experiences and in soft adventure such as wildlife viewing, bicycling and hiking.
- The increased number of working couples has resulted in less flexibility in terms of vacation and leisure time. As a result, there has been a strong shift from the traditional, two-to-three-week annual vacation to *more frequent, shorter vacations*. One result of this is that travellers are more concerned with having special experiences on their vacations. Since they only have a short amount of time off, they want to make sure that they have the best possible time.
- The population is becoming more *discerning and affluent*.

- Today's travel markets, particularly the aging baby boomers, also have a *desire to learn and participate in educational and cultural experiences* during their travel and leisure time. Thus, you will find more interest in museums, in tours and outings which have a learning component.

- The baby boomers have demanded more from their travel than previous generations, and particularly in their leisure travel. They have been responsible for the *growth in experiential tourism* - a desire for experiences that are meaningful and memorable. "Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into cultures, communities and the outdoors ... It shows rather than describes. It encourages people to actively participate in the experience ... it is very personal and individual... they seek diverse experiences that match their interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment"[1]

- There is a resurgence in the *value and importance of family*. Opportunities arising out of this trend include family outings/vacations and educational travel.

- Consumers are becoming more *value-conscious* while demanding *increased levels of service*. This is not to say that they are only looking for cheap products and services - they are willing to pay more but only if they receive good value and service.

- The *growth in the use of the Internet* has had profound implications for the tourism industry and for consumers. It has provided the industry with a powerful and very cost-effective new marketing tool. And it has *empowered consumers* by making it very easy to research travel offerings and shop for deals. Today's traveller arrives at a destination with a lot more information than they did in the past. This has implications for Visitor Information Centres - they must be prepared to provide more in-depth information and respond to questions from visitors who already have a lot of knowledge about the area.

- Today's travellers, like the population as a whole, are better educated than earlier generations. These well-educated tourists *strongly prefer authenticity* - people want experiences that are genuine, not contrived, and they are more discriminating in this respect than in the past.

- Well-travelled consumers have *high expectations about the standards of hospitality and service excellence* received from staff in the tourism industry. They *are increasingly more sophisticated* and demanding and expect and demand quality in both products and services. These expectations carry through to Visitor Information Centres - travellers expect to receive high quality service from well-trained staff when they stop at information centres.

2.7 Trends in Visitor Information Centres

Increasingly, VICs are taking advantage of new technologies to provide a higher quality of service to the customer. The computer, with Internet access, is now a critical tool for many VICs. For example, all of the land-based Provincial Visitor Information Centres are directly linked by computer to the Check In reservation and information system, enabling travel counsellors to make reservations or get information for visitors while they wait. Computers are available at many information centres for visitors to view websites and seek out information on places they want to visit.

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[1] Minister's Round Table on Parks Canada 2005, Pre-reading Material - Facilitate Visitor Experience, Page 1

2.8 Consumer Expectations About Information Centres

Travellers expect to find a wide range of information at VICs. They expect to be able to obtain information and brochures and get directions. At Provincial Information Centres, they expect more general information on a large geographic area while at local centres they expect more detailed information specific to the local area. Since many visitors already have a lot of information on the province, they are looking for more specifics and for suggestions and recommendations from counsellors as to what there is available to see and do that meets their specific interests.

Another main reason for stopping at information centres is to use the washroom. And, VICs are seeing increasing demand from travellers for access to computers so that they can check their email

For the traveller, the ideal VIC would:

- Have knowledgeable, friendly, professional, and well-trained staff;
- Have staff with comprehensive product knowledge who are trained and equipped to provide detailed information and recommendations based on their needs and wants;
- Be conveniently located and visible from the road;
- Be easy to find;
- Offer services such as brochures, maps, accommodation reservations;
- Have washrooms available for use;
- Have computers available for their use, with high speed Internet access;
- Have convenient hours of operation;
- Be located close to other services which they might need, such as a gas station or restaurant;
- Be located in a good quality building.

2.9 Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality Program

The Province of Nova Scotia, through the Tourism Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, introduced an Award of Quality Program for local Visitor Information Centres in 1994.

The mandate or purpose of the Award of Quality VIC program is to provide a professional level of service to visitors and to create short and long-term economic benefits to the community. The Award of Quality visual identity (logo or symbol) enables visitors to recognize VICs where they will receive a consistently high level of service.

Once becoming an Award of Quality VIC there are several benefits including such things as free distribution to the centre of provincial and private sector literature, a listing in the provincial Travel Guide and access to funding under government-sponsored employment programs. Non-accredited VICs (those not passing the Award of Quality inspection) will not have access to these benefits.

Tourism Division representatives conduct inspections and evaluations of VICs to ensure minimum standards are met and maintained. The criteria used in these evaluations, a detailed description of the Award of Quality Program including benefits and a list of responsibilities of a sponsoring organization can be obtained from the Quality Assurance Section of the Tourism Division.

SECTION 3

Requirements for Success

SECTION 3

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

The most important role of a local Visitor Information Centre is to provide information and services to visitors to the community. This information should help visitors have a good time in your community and area, and encourage them to spend money, extend their stay in the area, and return for repeat visits.

Therefore, a fundamental principle of your local Visitor Information Centre is that the development and operation of the centre should be consumer driven - that is, committed to satisfying the needs and desires of your customers, the visitors to your community.

The centre is also providing a service to the local business community and the municipality. It is important, therefore, also to give some consideration to their needs and expectations.

Research has indicated that travel information centres can have an influence on the amount of time and money that are spent in an area by travellers who stop at the centre. However, the research suggests that "simply operating a TIC [Travel Information Centre] does not guarantee that a large number of tourists will be influenced. Rather a . . . centre must have easy access, clear signage, adequate room and a trained staff."[2]

This suggests that for a VIC to be successful, careful attention must be paid to such factors as location of the centre, signage to direct people to the site, the centre's design and layout, and training of staff.

A summary of the requirements for the operation of a successful Visitor Information Centre is provided below. Some of them are explored in more detail in various other sections of the manual.

3.1 Marketing Effectiveness

Your Visitor Information Centre must be effective in satisfying the customer and in marketing and selling your community and its businesses to the visitor. This means more than just providing the visitor with the information they ask for, you must focus on helping the visitor have the best possible experience. This involves a combination of answering visitors' enquiries, as well as providing suggestions, recommendations and assistance in arranging things of interest to them, to see and do. A well-trained, knowledgeable staff is key to achieving this.

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[2] Tierney, Patrick T., *The Influence of State Traveller Information Centres on Tourist Length of Stay and Expenditures*, in **Journal of Travel Research**, Winter 1993.

3.2 Customer Utility and Mix of Services

Your Visitor Information Centre must provide visitors with a full range of information as well as the other services that they are looking for. Visitors will be looking for detailed information on a wide range of facilities and services in your local area, as well as information on other parts of the province. They will want maps, brochures, schedules, dates, and suggestions of things to see and do. As well, they may be looking for other services such as places to stay, washrooms, or emergency assistance of various kinds. If your centre cannot provide the information or service directly, then you should know where to find it.

3.3 Location/Access

Location, location and location are the three most important things for business and real estate, and also for Visitor Information Centres. It is vital that you locate the information centre where it is easily visible and accessible to visitors to your community.

3.4 Revenues/Funding

It is impossible to operate your Visitor Information Centre without funds to hire staff, maintain the building, pay the phone bill, etc. Some financial assistance for hiring staff is available under various summer employment programs. These are accessed through the Regional Tourism Associations and are discussed in more detail later in the manual. However, you will have to get the other funds required to operate your VIC from local businesses, business associations, and the local municipality. It is also important to look at the revenues you can generate in the information centre itself. Some suggestions are provided in Section 6 of this manual.

3.5 Industry Support

The support of the tourism industry in your community is essential. You will need them to provide you with the information to give to visitors, to participate in training programs and, most likely, to help support your Visitor Information Centre financially to some extent. The local tourism industry must be a key player in the planning for your Visitor Information Centre and in its ongoing operations.

SECTION 4

Operations

SECTION 4

OPERATIONS

4.1 Season and Hours of Operation

Season of Operation

Deciding on the season of operation for your VIC requires careful consideration and must take into account several factors.

Priority must be given to what season will best serve your customers' needs. The summer months, from mid-June through Labour Day used to be seen as the tourist season in Nova Scotia. Now, however, the peak tourist season stretches from May through to mid-October, and there are increasing numbers of visitors arriving earlier in spring, staying later in the fall and coming during the winter months. A key element of the Vision for Tourism discussed earlier is to address seasonality issues and make Nova Scotia a four-season destination - as such, you can expect to see more efforts dedicated to lengthening the tourist season.

Take a look at the operating season of other Visitor Information Centres in your area. It is important that at least one centre in the area be open during the early and later parts of the season (early-May to early-June, late-September to the end of October). If there is a VIC within 20 - 30 miles that is open during these periods, it may not be necessary for you to be open then. You can just post a notice on your centre and any highway signage telling visitors where they can get information during these periods.

At an absolute minimum, your VIC should be open from June 1 through mid-September, and we strongly recommend that you open from at least late-May through the end of September. If you are in an area where there are lots of visitors in the fall, then you should try to stay open for until after Thanksgiving weekend.

Hours of Operation

Again, serving customers' needs must be the first consideration in deciding on hours of operation. If your VIC has been operating for several years, look at the pattern of visitation. How late do visitors come into the VIC? What time do the earliest visitors arrive? Again, consider the hours of operation at any nearby VICs. There should be at least one or two centres in the region which are open between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. daily, throughout the season.

We recommend that during the peak season (mid June through mid September) your VIC should be open for 10 to 12 hours a day: from 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. until 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. During the earlier and later parts of the season, the centre should be open at least from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Make sure that your hours of operation are clearly posted and are visible from outside the building.

Your VIC must be open seven days a week to serve travellers. Sundays and holidays are usually busy days for tourist facilities; and the centre must be open to provide information to travellers at these times.

Both your season and hours of operation will be affected by the funds you have available to hire staff. If you do not have enough money to pay staff for the season and hours of operation you want to have, look at using trained volunteers to help keep the VIC open longer. Some suggestions about working with volunteers are provided later.

You will need to provide some basic information outside the centre for travellers who stop when the centre is not open. A billboard with a map of the community indicating the business area and the major facilities and services, as well as major roads and intersections is particularly useful to travellers. A pay phone with a listing of emergency numbers, the Check In toll-free number, and phone numbers for local accommodations, restaurants, and other services could also be provided. If you cannot provide a pay phone, you should indicate the location of the nearest phone, as well as a list of the important numbers described above.

4.2 Types of Information and Services Provided

What types of information should your VIC provide to visitors and what types of other services should you offer?

Trip Planning Information

Providing information to travellers to help them plan the details of their trip or a portion of their trip is the primary function of the Visitor Information Centre. The main types of information travellers are looking for include:

- Information on overnight accommodation;
- Information on things to see and do: attractions, local sights, festivals, events, sightseeing tours, picnic areas, museums, shops, etc.;
- Directions: distance and length of time to reach facilities and services in your region, as well as locations around the province;
- Information on places to eat;
- Assistance with planning their trip or their day: what route to take, where to stop, what to see along the way;
- Ferry schedules.

Local Visitor Information Centres should have information available on the local community and area, on the region, and on the rest of the province.

Information on the Local Area

Local Visitor Information Centres should have a very detailed knowledge of their community and the immediate area. Staff should be walking encyclopaedias of the area and need to have an intimate and detailed knowledge of the local area. (See the discussion on staff training later in this section.)

In order to satisfy these needs, your local Visitor Information Centre should have:

- Brochures and/or information on all of the visitor related services in your area including accommodations, campgrounds, museums, attractions, parks, shops, sightseeing tours, beaches, etc.
- Detailed information and knowledge on all of the things to see and do in the area. Since many visitors will already have a lot of basic information, they will be looking for the extra details and the suggestions on special places to visit and unique experiences in your area.
- Detailed information on, and knowledge of, area accommodations - how many rooms they have, what the rooms are like, other facilities available, do they take pets, do they have no smoking rooms, prices, etc. Some local Visitor Information Centres put together a photo album of local accommodations so that visitors can see for themselves what each property looks like.
- Information on area restaurants, including recent menus and prices.
- Information on area shops, particularly those selling products of interest to visitors such as craft shops, gift shops, etc. The VIC should have information on the days/hours of operation of these shops.
- Information on all of the festivals and events held in the area, including things such as church/community suppers and picnics, concerts, ceilidhs, etc.
- Community/area maps showing the main streets, details of the downtown area, how to get into/out of town, the location of major attractions and other facilities, etc.
- Detailed background information on the community and area including its history, economy, culture, etc.

Information on the Region

Local Visitor Information Centres should also have information on the region that can be readily accessed from their community, and staff should be familiar with the things to do and see and with the major attractions and visitor services throughout the region. However, you do not need to have as much detail on facilities and services in the region as you do for the local community. For example, if your VIC is located in Mahone Bay, you should also provide information on things to see and do and places to stay in other parts of the South Shore but you would not be expected to know all the details about these places. However, you should have brochures and printed information available and be able to tell visitors where they can obtain additional information.

It is important to be able to provide visitors with directions to other communities in the region and to major attractions, festivals, and facilities. If your VIC is in Bridgetown, for example, you should be able to tell visitors how to get to Wolfville and the Atlantic Theatre Festival but not necessarily be able to provide detailed directions to a particular Bed & Breakfast.

You should also be able to tell visitors where the Information Centres are located in the other communities in your region so they can stop for more detailed information.

Your VIC should stock brochures on the other communities in the region and on the visitor attractions, facilities, and services throughout the region.

Information on the Rest of the Province

Local VICs should also have general information and knowledge about the rest of Nova Scotia. Specifically, you should have, as available:

- The Nova Scotia Travel Guide and other provincial tourism publications;
- Provincial highway maps, and be able to provide directions to any part of the province;

Note that these first two items are only available to Award of Quality VICs.

- Regional travel guides on all of the other regions of the province;
- Information and brochures on major attractions and facilities, such as Fortress Louisbourg, Cape Breton Highlands National Park, the Halifax Citadel, the Fisheries Museum in Lunenburg, and Sherbrooke Village;
- Information and brochures on major festivals and special events, such as the Halifax Tattoo and the Mahone Bay Wooden Boat Festival;
- Information and brochures on unique and different facilities and services about which you find visitors are asking. This might include whale watching tours, for example.

It is not necessary to display brochures on all the attractions, facilities, and services from the parts of the province that are more distant from your VIC. You probably don't have enough space to do this anyway. If you find that you are receiving a lot of brochures from the Distribution Centre that are not being displayed, let them know so that they can be returned for use elsewhere. If the Distribution Centre sends you brochures that you do not feel are appropriate for your VIC, you do not have to display them. Keep them in a storage area where they can be easily found if someone is looking for that type of information. You might also consider rotating the brochures which are displayed if you are really short on space.

If you have a computer and Internet access in your VIC, bookmark the provincial tourism web site as well as the sites of key tourism associations, attractions and other things to see and do around the province, then you can easily search for up-to-date information or bring up details and pictures to show visitors.

One other comment regarding brochures. If your sponsoring organization is membership based, you may find some pressure to display only the brochures of your members. While it is appropriate to give the brochures belonging to your members more prominence in your displays, you must display other brochures as well. The visitor does not know the distinction between your members and nonmember and really doesn't care. All the visitor is concerned about is getting the information they need, and, as emphasized earlier, visitors' needs must be your first priority.

One type of information which requires special mention is festivals and events. Your Visitor Information Centre must have available up-to-date, detailed information on all of the festivals and events in the area. This will require you to keep in touch with the event organizers to get the necessary details and find out about any changes. You should have an Events bulletin board in the centre which provides all the details on what's happening this week. Don't forget even the smallest community events. You never know what type of thing will interest your visitors. This bulletin board can also be used to promote major festivals and events which might be occurring in your community over the course of the season.

Other Types of Information

Visitor Information Centres are also sources of information for a wide range of topics. We recommend that you keep a master reference book, Rolodex file or computerized data base for this type of information - something that can be easily updated or changed and is easy for the staff to use. Examples of the types of information you should have available include:

- Locations and phone numbers for emergency services - police, fire, ambulance, doctor, dentist, etc.;
- Locations of facilities/services such as:
    - garage/repair stations,
    - banks,
    - pharmacies,
    - churches,
    - hospitals,
    - ATMs (automated teller machines);
- Ferry schedules and websites (for all ferries) and numbers to call for reservations;
- Tide schedules (this is particularly important in some areas of the province - you may want to get a tide clock that can be displayed in the Centre);
- Phone numbers/web sites for weather reports;
- Bus schedules/web sites to find bus schedules;

- Exchange rates (you should phone the bank on a daily basis to get the current exchange rate for the U.S. dollar);
- Customs regulations;
- Fishing and hunting regulations;
- Information on the HST and PST and how to get refunds;
- Locations and operating hours of liquor stores;
- A 24-hour contact for the sponsoring organization;
- Traffic laws and regulations.

When you get a question for which you don't have the answer, make every attempt to find out and make sure you enter the information in the master file for future reference. It is also a good idea to have a *What's New* file which is updated daily with events, etc.

If you have received the VIC Award of Quality, you will have a copy of the Nova Scotia Information Book (Red Book) which is a comprehensive source of information. Don't forget you can also check the provincial tourism website (www.novascotia.com), the websites of regional tourism associations and destinations around the province, or call the Check In toll-free line for information.

Reservations

You have the option of providing reservations through your local Visitor Information Centre. Should you decide that this is a service you want to provide for your local business community, then you need to have a clearly defined procedure for knowing what is available and helping the visitor to make their decision.

As discussed in more detail later, it is important that the VIC staff do not recommend facilities. For one thing, everyone's taste is different and what may appeal to a VIC counsellor could be totally different from what appeals to the visitor. Secondly, it is unfair to the local businesses to recommend one property over another. Rather, you should provide the information the visitors need to make their decision about which property best suits their needs. If the visitor is concerned about the quality of the property, explain the Canada Select Accommodation Rating Program to them. Don't forget to tell them that the rating program is voluntary and not all properties participate. Therefore, properties that don't have star grades do not necessarily have poorer facilities and services than those that do. You should also mention the provincial accommodation licensing regulations. No VIC is permitted to have information on accommodation that is not licensed by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. (For more information on the Canada Select Program or licensing regulations, contact the Tourism Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage.)

How should your Visitor Information Centre go about making reservations for visitors?

One option, and an approach which are much easier for you, are to use the Check In reservation service. Provide visitors with a phone and the toll-free number so they can call Check In and arrange for a reservation at a property in your area.

However, if your local businesses feel strongly that you should provide this service locally, then you need to develop your own system.

First of all, you need to know what accommodation is available in your community. Prepare a summary sheet that lists all the properties and how many rooms they have. You may want to note, for the smaller properties, any unique features of specific rooms such as the availability of a Jacuzzi tub or fireplace. Make a copy of the summary for each day, and every morning the staff should check with each property and note how many/which rooms are still available for that evening. You may want to call again in the mid-afternoon or, alternatively, have the properties call you as their rooms are booked or if they fill up.

If a visitor in the information centre wants to find a place to stay, the staff should ask the following types of questions to narrow down the choices available:

- What type of accommodation are you looking for? e.g. hotel, motel, country inn, Bed & Breakfast, etc.
- What is your price range?
- Do you have any special requirements? e.g. must take pets, need a family room, no smoking room, need a wheelchair accessible unit.
- Do you have any other particular requests? e.g. swimming pool, on the ocean, etc.

Using the responses to these questions as a guide, provide the visitor with information on all of the properties that meet their requirements and that, to your knowledge, have space available. The visitor can then make their selection and you can use the Centre's phone to call the property. It is a good idea to get the visitor to talk to the accommodation operator directly to make their reservations/arrangements so as to eliminate any possible confusion.

Washrooms

Your VIC should provide clean washroom facilities for visitors. It is not necessary to have separate men's and women's washrooms, but if you are in a larger centre with a significant number of visitors, you probably should have at least two separate washrooms. Washrooms should have a counter suitable for changing infants.

Other Services

Local Visitor Information Centres can provide other services for visitors and for members of the local business community. These other services might include:

- Acting as a resource for local businesses servicing visitor markets. For example, local accommodation establishments should be able to call the VIC to get information on a local attraction or event to pass on to their guests.

- Take reservations or make bookings for local sightseeing tours or boat tours. (You may want to charge a fee to the business for this service. See the earlier discussion on generating revenues.);

- Sell tickets for local special events;

- Provide samples of local food products in conjunction with a related festival or association;

- Sell area arts and crafts.

Suggestions as to services which might generate revenue for the information centre are provided in Section 6.

4.3 Staffing

Staff Requirements

The number of staff required for your visitor centre will depend on your hours of operation and anticipated volume of visitors. It is recommended that your operational policies include not letting staff work alone. You could use volunteers to help meet this standard. If your information centre is particularly busy, you may need three or four staff on at a time or during the peak periods. As well, you will need more staff during the peak summer period when you are open for longer hours.

You will have to take into account the labour laws that require that anyone working more than 48 hours in a seven-day period be paid overtime (1.5 times their regular wage) in determining your staff requirements. It is recommended that at least one staff member be assigned the role of supervisor at all times, even if their major responsibility is as a counsellor. Senior or returning counsellors may be considered for this role.

Hiring Tips

We recommend that you establish a three-person Hiring Committee for your VIC. Initially, this should be three people from the sponsoring organization(s) who would hire the manager for the VIC. Once the manager is hired, this person should also sit on the hiring committee. You should establish a code of ethics or conflict-of-interest guidelines for your hiring committee, covering topics such as hiring close relatives of members of the Hiring Committee.

The following is a list of hiring tips which should be followed when hiring both the manager and the staff. The same process can be used both at the beginning of the season and later if you need to hire replacement staff midway through the season.

- Develop job descriptions that will meet the needs of the centre. You may use the job descriptions used by the Provincial Centres (see Appendix I for a Provincial Travel Counsellor Job Description) or you may develop your own, based on the occupational standards for Visitor Information Centre Counsellor and Supervisors.

- Advertise for staff in the local media; check out TIANS on-line job board (www.novascotiatourismtalent.com); contact the nearest Human Resources Centre of Canada; contact placement offices of public or private training institutions offering programs in tourism or hospitality; post notices on local community bulletin boards. To the extent possible, look for applicants who are Certified under the national Standards and Certification program described in the next section.

- Screen applicants and develop a short list of candidates for interviewing. (A sample applicant screening form is available on request from the Tourism Division)

- Prepare a standard interviewing form with a list of questions to be asked and other factors to be considered. These other factors might include:

  - Appearance;
  - Dress;
  - Attitude;
  - Language skills;
  - Education;
  - Communications skills;
  - Volunteer and work experience;
  - Knowledge.

  We suggest that you assign a maximum number of points achievable for each question and other factors. Each member of the Hiring Committee would then score each candidate and the total points awarded can be used as the basis for making the hiring decisions. This approach is particularly valuable when you are interviewing more than three or four persons, since it is very difficult to remember how each applicant responded once you have finished a day or two of interviewing. It also provides a record of the qualifications of each candidate, should questions arise about why a specific candidate did/did not get the position.

  A sample interview scoring form is available on request from the Tourism Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage.

- Interview applicants and compile scores/recommendations. As well, the candidates' answers to questions should be recorded. Select the preferred candidates for the positions you have available. Ask for and always check references. The middle of the season is no time to discover that the poor performance of a staff member was experienced by an earlier employer.

- Make the job offer. At this time, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the position, training opportunities, performance expectations, remuneration and benefits, terms of employment for the season, etc. Also, provide a job description. Since working in a Visitor Information Centre requires both weekend and evening work, make sure this is clearly stated and understood by prospective employees. Finally, obtain a signature of agreement from the employee that he or she has been provided with all of the above information and accepts the requirements.

4.4 emerit Standards and Certification

Nova Scotia's Tourism Human Resource Council is a partner with the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council in the development of National Occupational Standards and manages the process for Nova Scotia. Standards and Certification are being developed for occupations in all sectors of the tourism industry, and standards currently exist for 49 occupations. Certification is available for 25 of these occupations.

Standards are statements outlining the attitude, knowledge and skills required of an individual in order to be considered competent in an occupation. Standards clarify expectations and can be used to design consistent training, education and professional development programs. The Standards development process involves the sharing from industry professionals who perform the job, as well as their supervisors who are recruited to develop the content of the Standards.

Certification is the recognition of an individual's competency in his or her occupation. National Certification is a three-step process involving a written examination, performance review and industry evaluation. Professionals who achieve National Certification will be recognized across the country for meeting industry requirements in their selected occupation. The candidate must be employed in the occupation and must have achieved a minimum number of hours of work experience (the number of hours varies depending on the occupation), prior to completing Certification.

Flexible learning options for the industry now allow new entrants to gain a solid foundation while experienced and knowledgeable candidates can challenge the option that best suits their needs. What each candidate learns is credited towards future learning - creating recognition of prior learning and allowing candidates to move towards the goal - **emerit** National Certification - at their own pace.

Learners can select the best option for them:
- Standards/Workbook study
- Online Learning
- Study selected modules to enhance performance of specific skills
- Challenge full certification

The development of Standards and the implementation of Certification is having various positive impacts on the tourism industry, as follows:

- Enhancing the image of tourism occupations;
- Enhancing human resource management skills in the tourism industry;
- Providing practical, realistic training programs for tourism occupations;
- Raising the overall level of professionalism in the industry.

More details on Standards and Certification, and a listing of the occupations for which standards have been developed can be found at www.emerit.ca . Additional information on human resource tools and certification can be obtained from the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council. Appendix III also provides more details on Standards and Certification.

Standards and certification are available for Tourism/Visitor Information Centre Supervisor and Tourism Visitor Information Counsellor.

The majority of your staff should be certified Visitor Information Counsellors. These staff play a vital role in the delivery of tourism services and contribute to the success of the industry in general. Your Centre and its staff have the opportunity to make an impact on the tourism industry, and on your local economy. Therefore, your staff should be carefully selected and well trained.

4.5 Staff Skills

The following are the major skills and knowledge requirements for a Visitor Information Centre Counsellor, as outlined in the national standards for this occupation. You should refer to the standards document for a complete overview of the occupational guidelines. You can obtain this information from the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council. See the appendices for addresses.

Visitor Information Centre Counsellor Skills

- Tourism Industry Awareness

Counsellors should be knowledgeable about the eight sectors of the tourism industry, the social and economic benefits of tourism, and the benefits of promoting tourism.

- Attitude

The ability to exhibit a positive attitude is essential for the counsellor and involves the following attributes:

- Positive attitude including enthusiasm, friendliness;
- Professionalism;
- Being a team member;
- Willingness to upgrade skills and knowledge;
- Adherence to ethics.

- Communications Skills

The counsellor must be able to:

Communicate effectively and understand the benefits of, and obstacles to, effective communications, verbal and nonverbal. The counsellor requires effective listening, speaking and writing abilities, and the ability to process incoming telephone calls. Communicating with special needs visitors and handling difficult situations are also important skills. Counsellors also require skills in problem solving.

- Operational Procedures

The counsellor should be able to follow operational guidelines for: opening the facility, starting a shift, performing daily administration tasks (e.g., collecting visitor statistics, obtaining current status reports for weather, fire hazards, currency exchange rates), keeping the facility operational (e.g. maintaining supplies, maintaining interior and exterior of the centre), following guidelines for ending shifts and closing procedures.

The counsellor should know how to follow safety procedures. This refers to the staff's ability to adhere to safety guidelines such as: identifying locations of safety features in the centre (e.g. first aid kit, safety exit), monitoring facility and grounds for safety hazards, reporting problems and hazards to the supervisor.

- Information Services

Providing information services is the focal point of the counsellor's role and requires a wealth of product knowledge and service skills. Using product knowledge and available resources, your counsellors will be able to provide service and offer options to visitors which will enhance their stay. The requirements for providing information services include:

  - Product knowledge;
  - Ability to use resource materials;
  - Ability to provide service to the visitor;
  - Ability to record visitor statistics.

- Merchandising

  For those centres that retail merchandise to visitors, this skill area is also required. This includes providing information about the articles for sale and using effective selling techniques to boost sales.

Supervisory Requirements

It is assumed that a VIC manager/supervisor possesses all of the skills and knowledge of a counsellor and in addition require the following:

Management Skills, in order to plan activities, develop and/or implement action plans. The manager may also be required to make presentations, e.g. to local groups.

Staff Supervision Skills, so that they may be able to assist with hiring, assist with or deliver training to new staff and volunteers, and direct staff in day-to-day functions. Managers/supervisors may also monitor staff performance and assist with staff appraisals.

Operations Management, in case they are required to interface with representatives of the sponsoring organization(s), oversee information services and carry out administrative functions, ensure day-to-day operation of the facility, and process statistics. The manager/supervisor may also handle payroll and pay distribution. If you have any retail sales, the manager/supervisor will also be responsible for handling the money received.

The recently completed Visitor Information Services Strategy emphasizes the importance of developing strong selling skills in staff so they may fully utilize opportunities to encourage visitors to stay in the area longer and to be true ambassadors for Nova Scotia.

The focus of the Visitor Information Centre staff should be on assisting the visitor to have the best possible overall experience in visiting the community and Nova Scotia. Achieving this involves a combination of answering the visitor's inquiries as well as providing suggestions and assistance in arranging things of value to see and do.

In order to be able to do this, your Visitor Information Centre staff should also be trained in the following skills:

- The ability to listen carefully;
- The ability to answer inquiries knowledgeably;
- The ability to assist visitors with travel arrangements;
- The ability, when time allows, to draw the visitor out with respect to the time they have available, their budget, and interests;
- The skill to suggest things to do and see when the visitor is clearly open to or seeking suggestions;
- The interpersonal skill to develop the visitor's confidence and trust so they will rely on the travel counsellor to help them make their visit to your community and area, and to Nova Scotia, a pleasurable one;
- The ability to handle difficult situations and people and demonstrate effective problem solving skills.

The first two skills could be defined as providing **service** to the visitor while the other three could be narrowly defined as **selling**. However, if done properly, selling skills are not a provocative measure but are an enhanced response to the customer's needs and desires. As such, they truly fit within the concept of maximizing customer satisfaction and they should be encouraged. The key is the skill of the counsellor in the skills defined above, rather than in pressing things on visitors in an unwelcome manner. Your staff should, therefore, be trained in these skills, to enable them to sell the area's added value features in a way that is welcomed by and not intimidating to the visitor.

The issue of dealing with requests for recommendations should be dealt with in a similar manner, with counsellors being trained to ask sufficient questions to narrow down the decision to a short list of opportunities, rather than make specific recommendations.

4.6 Training

Training opportunities should focus on the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required of professional counsellors and their vital role in the overall tourism industry area. Training should be based on the occupational performance standards and Certification should be a goal for all employees.

The Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality Program requires that your staff participate in a recognized, accredited training program. Training programs are usually coordinated through your Regional Tourism Association - contact them for details (Contact information is provided in the appendix).

There is also the opportunity for your staff to participate in the province's product knowledge tours for any regions of the province other than your own. VIC managers and counsellors participating in these tours are given an opportunity to see, first hand, various tourism products throughout the province. Participation in these tours by local VICs is on a first-come, first-served basis and is also coordinated through the Regional Tourism Association.

It is recommended that all staff complete the SuperHost training program. SuperHost is an internationally recognized Quality Customer Service Training Program that focuses on communication and customer service. This seven-hour interactive workshop examines attitudes to service and interaction with customers. This program is suitable for any business that deals with customers and is an inspiration for commitment to service excellence. Another valuable program you may want to consider for your staff is Service First which is designed to enhance service skills and allow participants to make a true connection with visitors. Information on both SuperHost and Service First can be accessed through the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council (www.tourismhrc.com) or your regional tourism association.

You are also required to have at least one person on duty at all times who has first aid training and we recommend that all of your staff have a basic first aid course, including CPR training. As well, it is quite likely that you will be required to have a staff person who has completed WHMIS training (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) - employers are required to provide WHMIS training to employees who work in contact with or in proximity to materials that are defined as hazardous - these may include cleaning products, paints and solvents. The Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council provides WHMIS training programs including an on-line option.

Another option is developing and delivering your own training sessions or hiring an outside consultant or training organization to do it for you. Training resource material can be found through your Regional Tourism Association or the TIANS Resource Centre. The Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage can loan training videos and also has CDs that provide product information on each of the Scenic Travelways/regions of the province.

Whatever training program your staff take, you should also have your own training program focussing on the operation of your information centre, your policies and procedures and on local knowledge. Your own training program should include a familiarization trip (FAM) around the local and regional area for your staff. You may want to do the local area one just with your staff, and work with other information centres in the area and the Regional Tourism Association to do a regional FAM trip.

It is important for staff to have first-hand knowledge of the attractions, facilities, and services in the area if they are to service the visitor successfully. The FAM trip should include visits to attractions, parks, beaches, accommodation facilities, the downtown area, and any other key visitor services. Allow time on the FAM trip for the owners/managers of these facilities to give the staff a tour and a briefing on their facility. Just driving by on a bus and looking out of the window at an attraction or accommodation property is not enough. You probably won't have enough time to visit all the facilities but try to tour a good selection of the facilities in your area and encourage your staff to visit the other facilities on their own time.

Encourage your staff to participate in the provincial Open Door Program and visit as many tourism attractions and facilities around the province as they can. Under this program, front line staff of tourism businesses (including VICs) can get an Open Door Card which entitles them to a discount or value added experience at participating tourism attractions and other businesses around the province.

You should also have on-site, refresher training programs during the season: perhaps an hour or so a week to talk about upcoming events, new facilities, and services in the area and how to handle different types of situations. These should be the responsibility of the manager/ supervisor of the information centre.

Before the season starts, your counsellors should be tested informally on the information they are expected to know and the services they are to provide. You can do this through role playing: the manager can act as a visitor asking staff for information on a range of facilities and services.

At the end of the season, you should complete a Staff Performance Review for each staff member. These should be completed by the manager and reviewed with the staff person. It is also a good idea to have a mid-season performance review to help the staff make any necessary improvements in their performance and to provide them with some personal goals for the balance of the season.

You should have a Performance Review sheet, covering all the skills required. An example of the Performance Review sheet used by Provincial Information Centres can be obtained through the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. As well, ask each staff member to provide an assessment of the job from their perspective - these may provide you with some beneficial suggestions for the next season.

4.7 Staff Uniforms

The staff should be neatly dressed and readily identifiable to visitors walking in the door of your centre. While it is not necessary to have a special uniform, it is recommended that your staff adhere to a dress code: white shirt, blouse, or golf shirt with your logo, and dark (navy) pants, skirt, or walking shorts. At many centres in the province, staff wear the Nova Scotia tartan in the form of either a tie, scarf, or sash.

All staff should have name tags with the first name only. Staff at centres which have received the Award of Quality will receive name tags from the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage.

4.8 Volunteer Development

The process of recruiting volunteers for your VIC is similar to hiring paid employees. The major difference is that volunteers become part of your operation through a sense of community pride and interest in the tourism industry (Hopefully, this applies to your paid employees as well!).

Volunteers have decided to make a commitment to your organization instead of spending their free time doing other things of interest. For this reason, volunteers need special recognition of their involvement and contributions. Where do you get them? How should you choose them? How do you train them? How can they be recognized for their commitment?

Successful use of volunteers requires an organized and committed approach on your part. The following steps will help you get the most from your volunteers and your volunteers get the most from the experience!

- Plan a Volunteer Program

  Here are some basic criteria for developing and planning the work of volunteers in your local Visitor Information Centre.

  - The work planned for the volunteers should be meaningful and clearly significant to the operation of the VIC. It should be rewarding and interesting; not simply work that no one else wishes to do.

  - Develop a volunteer training program. Training volunteers is important and they should also participate in the FAM tours.

  - The work must be able to be done on evenings and weekends, although some volunteers, such as retirees, are available for tasks to be done during the week days.

  - Paid staff must be willing to work with volunteers and understand how their roles relate to those of the volunteers.

  - A regular paid staff member, preferably the manager, should be designated as the volunteer coordinator.

  - Volunteer policies and procedures should be provided to all volunteer recruits (these may not differ much from staff policies and procedures).

- Establish a Favourable Volunteer Climate

  Providing information to staff on the planned use of volunteers is crucial to ensuring a pleasant working environment for volunteers.

- Volunteer Recruitment

  Volunteers can be recruited from any number of sources within the community but chances are they will be easier to find through related organizations such as the sponsoring organization, the Chamber of Commerce, or the Regional Tourism Association. Retired people, especially those who have travelled a lot, may be particularly valuable as volunteers.

  Allow volunteers to negotiate the time they provide to the VIC. In a paid employment situation, the employer dictates how many hours per day or week they require the employee. This approach usually does not work with volunteers. It is important that you offer volunteers a work schedule that fits into their lives or they may take their time and experience to another worthy cause.

  Define the skills and abilities required for the volunteer position in the same way you do for paid employees. Put together a job description outlining desirable traits and experience for the volunteer work required. This important step can help you avoid the uncomfortable situation of having volunteers whose qualifications do not meet your needs. People approaching you to offer volunteer services can be provided with a Volunteer Job Description and can do a self-assessment before committing to work at the Visitor Information Centre.

- Screening and Interviewing Volunteers

  In the first place, volunteers should be interviewed for positions in much the same manner as potential paid staff. The following should be considered about each person who is interviewed for a volunteer position:
  - Ability to communicate well;
  - Level of enthusiasm/general attitude;
  - Other interests and hobbies;
  - Flexibility and commitment;
  - Level of self-confidence;
  - Understanding of the role of the Visitor Information Centre;
  - Previous work and volunteer experience;
  - Knowledge of the community and surrounding area.

- Orientation and Training

  Like all staff members, volunteers cannot be expected to meet the standards of service in a VIC without proper training. It is important that volunteers attend training programs similar to those provided to paid staff. As well, use senior staff to provide orientation or job shadowing sessions.

- Volunteer Recognition and Awards

  The following are some ways that you can make your volunteer force feel appreciated:

  - put an article about your volunteers in the local newspaper, industry trade paper or sponsor organization newsletter;

  - offer volunteers the opportunity to attend your training sessions and invite skilled volunteers to train other volunteers;

  - acquire complementary or discount coupons at local businesses for volunteers.

  You must be careful, however, not to overshadow the efforts of your paid staff.

4.9 Administration

The day-to-day administration of the Centre will primarily be the manager's responsibility. The manager should be given full responsibility by the sponsoring organization. However, the sponsoring organization must provide a contact person 24 hours per day and also provide administrative and management support.

The primary administrative duties include:

- Scheduling staff hours;
- Reporting hours for payroll purposes;
- Supervising staff;
- On-the-job training;
- Ensuring the delivery of quality visitor information services;

- Day-to-day operation of the centre;
- Cash management, if the centre handles cash;
- Maintaining a reasonable supply of brochures and other information;
- Liaising with local area businesses/members;
- Liaising with other Visitor Information Centre and the Regional Tourism Association;
- Reporting to the sponsoring organization (s);
- Inventory control, if the centre sells any products;
- Handling complaints;
- Performance appraisals.

Handling Complaints

One of the responsibilities of the manager should be handling any complaints that are received. If complaints are about the information centre itself or its staff, they should be handled internally. If complaints are about other visitor facilities and services in the province, they should be forwarded to the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. Ask the visitor to complete the complaint form in the provincial travel guide and send them directly to ht the Tourism Division, or leave them with you to be forwarded. If there is anything you can do to rectify the situation, do it. Whatever the situation, your manager should avoid getting into a confrontational situation with the visitor. Accept their complaints politely and assure them that they will be forwarded to the appropriate agency.

4.10 Marketing

Like any business, you will need to market your VIC to its potential customers - visitors to the community. Signage is a particularly important marketing tool and it is addressed in detail in Section 7.

Other marketing activities that can be undertaken to promote your VIC include:

- If you are an Award of Quality Visitor Information Centre, you will receive a listing in the Nova Scotia Travel Guide.

- Make sure any brochures on your community, and your community website, identifies the VIC and its location.

- Make sure local businesses, particularly places such as gas stations and stores, as well as accommodations and attractions, are aware of your location. These are the types of places where visitors frequently ask for information and their staff can refer them to you.

- Make sure the community as a whole is aware of the VIC and the services it provides. You could arrange to have regular stories written about the VIC in the local newspaper and have a grand opening for the community early in the season. These types of initiatives will also help generate community support for your VIC, and such support can be useful when approaching groups/organizations for funding and sponsorships.

- Participate in Tourism Awareness Week, held in June each year. Contact the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia (TIANS) for more information.

4.11 Industry Communication

It is important that you maintain open communications with tourism-related businesses in your community. Encourage business people to drop into the VIC from time to time. Make sure that you give your local businesses lots of notice if you are running out of their brochures. Deal promptly with any complaints or concerns from the industry when they are bought to the attention of your staff or manager.

You should also maintain good communications with other local and provincial Visitor Information Centres in your region. You should chat with them regularly to make sure you have up-to-date information on events happening in their area or new facilities and services. Keep their websites book marked so you can access them quickly for visitors looking for information on other areas. You may also have to call on other VICs to help a visitor in your centre.

Finally, you need to maintain communications with the regional tourism association in your area. They are an important link in the provision of visitor information services in the province and can provide assistance and advice. They receive information from the province as well as the provincial tourism industry association (TIANS) and will pass this on to you as necessary.

4.12 Security and Emergency Procedures

Your centre should have an established procedure to provide for the security of staff at the Centre and also to deal with any emergencies which may occur.

Security

There should be at least two staff on duty at the Visitor Information Centre at all times. If your budget does not permit this, then you should recruit volunteer assistance to supplement the paid staff.

The Centre should be located in a well-lit area with lots of traffic, not in an out-of-the-way location.

Name tags should include only first names.

The Centre should have some type of alarm system so staff can call for help. This might be a button on the phone which automatically calls the police, an intercom to an adjacent building that is always staffed, or perhaps a siren button. If you are building or renovating, put in two doors so there is an escape exit, for both security and emergency purposes. You should also check with your local police or RCMP for other security measures.

In addition, your local police force should be aware of the Centre's hours of operation. You may want to arrange for them to check on the Centre regularly, particularly in the evening. It is also a good idea to establish a friendly relationship with nearby businesses so they can be called on to assist if necessary.

Emergency Procedures

The manager of the Centre should establish emergency procedures, in consultation with local authorities such as the fire department and the local police or RCMP. Any emergency occurrences should be documented and reported to the sponsoring organization immediately.

Your Centre should have a standard first aid kit. It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that the kit is maintained and stocked. Any accidents occurring on the site, whether to staff or to visitors, should be recorded and reported to the sponsoring organization.

If the public is involved in an incident or accident, the report should include:

- Who was involved?
- Why did the accident happen?
- Where did the accident happen?
- What action was taken?
- When did the accident happen?
- How soon after the accident was it reported?

A sample accident reporting form is available from the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage.

You should also complete reports on other incidents such as vandalism or robbery.

Your report should also include the names and addresses of the people involved as well as similar information on any witnesses. Also describe any property, belongings, equipment, or machines involved.

4.13 Visitor Statistics and Surveys

Visitor Statistics

You should keep statistics on the numbers of visitors to your Centre, by day and also by time of day. These statistics should include the number of visitors/parties counselled, as well as the total number who visit the Centre. This will help you plan the operating season and hours and your staff requirements for next year. As well, having information on the total number of visitors to your Centre will help make a case to your sponsors and the local business community for support.

The most common way of keeping track of the number of visitors is to have a guest book and ask visitors to sign the book. This is not perfect, however, since some visitors will not sign the book and others will wander in and pick up some information without talking to a counsellor. You may also wish to have a counter: either a manual one operated by one staff member who clicks the counter every time a visitor walks in or an automatic one installed on the door. (Electronic door counters are relatively cheap now - $350 or so and easily installed.) If you use an electronic counter, you will have to adjust your total counts for staff walking in and out of the door.

Even if you use an electronic counter, it is a good idea to also have a guest book since it provides some idea of where your visitors come from. The book should have space for:

- The name of the visitor;

- Address/Where they are from;
- Number in party;
- Time of day (or you can note the time in the book every hour);
- Comments.

Each morning, staff should note the day's date in the guest book and also the weather for future reference. You may want to note any special events. Statistics should be summarized on a weekly and monthly basis.

You may be asked to supply statistics on your visitors to the Tourism Division, as part of the Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality program.

Surveys

It is a good idea to conduct regular surveys of the visitors to your VIC. The information you collect could be very useful to your sponsoring organization or members of the business community, providing them with insight into the visitors to your community and their interests and opinions. As well, you may want to assess the level of visitor satisfaction with the services you are providing. Various options are available in conducting visitor surveys, ranging from simple and cheap approaches to complex and more expensive ones.

You must, however, be very careful when interpreting the results of any surveys that you do. Only a small proportion of all the visitors to the community stop at your VIC. You cannot, therefore, suggest that the findings of your survey apply to all visitors to the community. It may be that the opinions and characteristics of visitors to the VIC are not typical of all the visitors to the community. For this reason, you should, when reporting the results of any surveys, indicate clearly that they apply only to those who visited the VIC.

The best type of information to collect in a survey of visitors at the VIC is qualitative information - that is information such as opinions, attitudes, and levels of satisfaction - rather than quantitative or numerical information - the amount of money spent, for example. The types of information which you could collect and which might be useful to your community include:

- Why do visitors come to the community?
- What did they do/intend to do while they are here?
- How did they hear about the community?
- What is their level of satisfaction with the things they have seen/done?
- Is there anything the community could do to improve its appeal to visitors?
- Why did they stop at the VIC?
- Was there anything they expected to find at the VIC which wasn't there?

You also want to collect some basic information on the persons surveyed, such as:

- Where they live;
- Number of persons in the party.

The simplest way to conduct a visitor survey is described below:

- Design a brief questionnaire. Four or five questions is enough. As much as possible, make the questions multiple-choice. They are easier to answer and easier to tabulate.

- Decide if you want to have your staff ask the questions and fill in the responses or if you want to give visitors cards and ask them to complete them and drop them in a box. If you intend to ask visitors to rate the services with which they were provided in the VIC, the latter approach is much preferred. Visitors are likely to find it difficult to tell staff that they don't do a good job.

- Decide on the survey period. You may want to conduct the survey during one month or during the first week of every month.

  Whatever period you choose, you also need to pick some times for surveying, called stints. You need to make sure that you have stints at different times of the day and on different days of the week but you don't necessarily need to conduct the survey every day.

  If, for example, you are doing a survey during the first week of every month, pick eight to ten survey times (each time may be only one to two hours), with some in the morning, afternoon, and evening, some on the weekend, and some during the week.

- Conduct the survey during the selected times. In order to get some degree of reliability in the survey results, you should pick the respondents (visitors to reply to the survey) randomly. For example, pick every tenth visitor to the Centre during the stint time or every half hour ask all the visitors in the Centre to complete the survey.

- Tabulate the survey results, either by hand or using a computer program if you have access to one. You should have at least 100 completed surveys before you report any findings, the findings will have very little meaning with anything less than this.

If your sponsor and/or business community has decided that conducting a consumer survey is a major priority, you may wish to retain some professional assistance. Contact your local college or university, or a business consulting firm to provide you with expert advice on designing the questionnaire and conducting the survey.

If you do not have the staff time or resources to conduct this type of survey, you could conduct an informal survey. Develop one or two simple questions each month. Have your staff ask the question to every other visitor and make a notation of their response on a simple score sheet. At the end of the month, summarize the responses and decide on the question for the next month.

4.14 Maintenance

You need to make suitable arrangements for the cleaning and maintenance of your Visitor Information Centre, both inside and outside. Several options are available.

The sponsoring group can contract with an outside cleaning company to clean the centre on a daily or weekly basis throughout the season. If this cleaning is done on a weekly basis, then you will need to get your staff to keep the facilities clean in between times - sweeping the floor, cleaning the bathroom, etc.

In some cases, a member of the sponsoring group takes responsibility for maintenance. This might be the local municipality or a service club. Or this group might handle the outside maintenance while staff handles the inside cleaning.

In other cases, keeping the facility clean might be the responsibility of the staff. In this case, your manager will need to draw up a daily and weekly schedule of cleaning tasks and ensure that staff are assigned to each task. Don't forget things like washing the windows, cutting the grass, and watering the plants. Washrooms will need cleaning on a frequent basis throughout the day, as well as each evening.

Whatever option works for your Centre, it is essential that the centre and the surrounding area be clean and appealing to visitors. It is a good idea to establish a daily checklist for the staff to follow first thing in the morning to ensure that everything is in tip-top condition.

4.15 Environmentally Sustainable Operations

Increasing emphasis is being placed on the operation of tourism businesses in Nova Scotia in an environmentally sustainable manner. The manager and staff of your Visitor Information Centre should be aware of the principles of sustainable tourism, and you should operate your Centre in a manner that is consistent with these principles. For more information, and specific operating guidelines, contact the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia which has available Sustainable Tourism Self-Audit Workbooks to assist tourism businesses with implementing environmentally sustainable practices.

4.16 Organizing and Maintaining Your Literature Display Area

Organizing and keeping your literature display area neat and tidy and easy for visitors to use is a particular challenge, particularly in smaller centres with limited space. Section 8 describes design specifications for brochure racks, which can be free standing or fixed to the wall. You will probably need as many racks as you have space for.

We recommend that your literature first be organized by geographic area: your community, your travel region, and the other travel regions/Travelways. The system of travel regions is used in all of the provincial travel literature and in provincial Visitor Information Centres. Visitors to the province are, therefore, very aware of these regions. Of course, you will dedicate the most space to your community and to the rest of your region, with more limited space for each of the other travel regions.

A prominent sign containing both the trail logo and the trail name should be installed either above or on the brochure rack. If you have enough space, you may also want to display a poster or photograph from each region. The regional travel guides should be located in their respective areas.

The private literature (brochures) should be organized as follows, with labels clearly distinguishing between the different types of literature:

- Attractions and festivals/events;
- Outdoor activities including sightseeing tours, hiking, biking, etc.;

- Accommodations;
- Camping;
- Restaurants and other services.

Organizing brochures this way is particularly important for the section devoted to your local community and region. It makes it very easy for visitors to find the types of information for which they are looking. If you do not have enough space to use this approach for the other regions, cluster the information under two headings:

- Attractions, activities, tours, and festivals/events, i.e. things to do and see;
- Visitor services - accommodations, restaurants, etc.

We suggest you tape a copy of each brochure to the back of the rack, then if the last brochure is taken, you can restock easily from your supplies. You will have to keep an eye on your supplies, particularly of provincial and regional literature, so you can reorder from the distribution centre before you run out. Make sure you allow sufficient time for delivery of new supplies.

Provincial travel literature can be displayed in a central rack or, if supplies are limited, you may wish to store it below the counter and distribute this material in response to specific requests.

4.17 Opening and Closing the Visitor Information Centre

You should develop a check list of the procedures for staff to follow in opening and closing your VIC each day. Of course, all centres have some procedures specific to their particular facility. The following provides some ideas for your check list:

Opening

- Check to see if doors, windows, or locks have been opened or tampered with. If they have, do not go inside the building alone, call for assistance. If everything looks O.K., unlock the door (s).
- Turn off outside lights;
- Turn on inside lights, if required;
- Turn on air conditioner or fan, if required;
- Put out exterior displays, such as flags, welcome mat, if you have them;
- Put money in cash register, if available. (Money should not be left in the cash register overnight; it should be removed to a secure place.);
- Check the grounds around the Centre for trash, papers, cigarette butts, etc. and clean up;
- Check to make sure the washroom(s) is clean, and if not, clean and check for sufficient toilet paper, paper towels, etc.;

- Check and empty waste baskets and sweep floor, if necessary;
- Enter the day and date in the Guest Register;
- Read any notes left by staff from the evening before;
- Check bulletin boards and counter for any outdated notices or brochures and remove them;
- Make sure the brochure racks and displays have sufficient quantities of literature, and are tidy;
- Phone accommodations to check on their vacancies for the night, if your Centre makes accommodation reservations in the local area.

Closing

- Clean up the Centre, including the washrooms. Empty waste baskets; clean toilet, sink and counter; sweep floors and refill paper towel and toilet paper dispensers, as well as soap dispensers, if appropriate;
- Complete the statistics for the day;
- Bring in any outside displays such as flags, etc.;
- Check the brochure racks and displays to make sure there are sufficient quantities of literature and refill if necessary. Also, tidy up brochures.
- If you have an outdoor display case, stock it with brochures for the evening;
- Lock doors (from the inside) and windows;
- Turn off air conditioner/fan, and computers, if appropriate;
- Turn on outside lights;
- If you have a cash register, take appropriate readings/tapes and remove cash and charge slips to a secure location;
- Leave the building, relocking the door behind you and double check it is locked.

SECTION 5

Organization

SECTION 5

ORGANIZATION

Your local Visitor Information Centre must have at least one not-for-profit sponsoring organization or group (The sponsor must be a not-for-profit organization in order for the Centre to qualify for the Award of Quality Program.) In many cases several groups or organizations are involved in sponsoring local VICs. There are a variety of possible sponsoring organizations, as discussed below. It is very important that the tourism-related businesses in the community be supportive of the Visitor Information Centre and have some involvement in its operation.

The sponsoring organization(s) will need to find funds for the development of the Centre, and will also have to have funds for the operation of the Centre. While it is possible to get some provincial funding support towards hiring staff (see discussion on Funding in the next section), there are other operating costs such as power, maintenance, phone bills, etc. which are the responsibilities of the sponsoring organization(s).

The various organizations which might be involved in sponsoring your VIC are discussed below.

5.1 Regional Tourism Associations

There are a number of regional tourism associations in Nova Scotia and they play a major role in marketing the region to visitors, as well as providing visitor-information services. Some of these associations operate Visitor Information Centres in communities within their region. If you think that there is a need for a Visitor Information Centre in your community, one of your first tasks should be to approach the Regional Tourism Association (addresses are provided in the appendix) and seek out their ideas and suggestions. The Regional Tourism Association can also provide you with some good advice on whether developing a new VIC is the best option for enhancing tourism activity in your community.

There is a possibility that the Regional Tourism Association **might** be interested in operating a VIC in your community, but they will probably only consider it if the centre is located in a major community and the VIC can play a major role in providing information on the entire region.

Even if the Regional Tourism Association cannot operate your VIC directly, it is important that you develop and maintain a good relationship with this organization, since any provincial employment funding which is available flows through the Regional Tourism Associations. This is discussed further in the next section of the manual.

5.2 Local Municipality

Your local municipality is another option for a sponsoring organization. In many communities around Nova Scotia, it is the municipality that sponsors the VIC, often in partnership with the local business or tourism association.

If the municipality is going to be the sponsoring organization, then you should establish some way for local tourism businesses to be involved. Perhaps a Visitor Information Centre committee could be established with representation from the municipality as well as the local business community. This committee would then have the responsibility for developing policies, hiring the manager, determining the season of operation, etc.

In some communities, the municipality is not the sponsoring organization but does assist with the operation and maintenance of the VIC. For example, municipal staff might perform site maintenance and collect garbage, and the municipality might fund some of the costs of the Centre such as the power and phone bill. In other cases, the municipality owns the building and the sponsoring organization has responsibility for operations.

5.3 Other Local Organizations

Another option is to have a local business or tourism association as the sponsoring organization, with some support provided by the municipality.

Many communities have a Business Association, Board of Trade, or Chamber of Commerce; these are membership-based organizations representing the business community. A VIC committee of this association could be established, and this committee could take responsibility for the development and/or operation of the Centre.

The business association would then take responsibility for the operating costs of the VIC. This might well involve approaching the municipality for financial support or services and working with other groups and organizations in the community, such as service clubs and youth groups, to provide specific services such as site maintenance.

Since, in this case, it is the fees paid by members of the association that support the VIC, you will have to develop a policy for nonmember businesses that wish to have their literature displayed in the information centre. Since the primary goal of the centre is to serve the visitor, it is important that you have information available on all of the businesses in the area, whether they are members of your association or not. You must carry everybody's literature but perhaps you could give members' brochures more prominence in your display.

5.4 Other

There are a number of other possible organizational structures for VICs. In some communities, local service clubs, such as the Lion's Club or Jaycees, are the sponsoring organizations. In other cases, a cooperative of tourism-related businesses or a number of the organizations identified above work together. Whatever works best for your community is appropriate, but remember that the main function of the centre is to serve visitors to your community, and that the support and participation of tourism businesses in your area are essential.

SECTION 6

Funding the Operation of the Centre

SECTION 6

FUNDING THE OPERATION OF THE CENTRE

Obviously, you will require funds to cover the costs of operating your Visitor Information Centre. By far the largest cost is wages for your manager and staff, but you will also need funds for:

- Building maintenance and supplies, including such things as postage, stationery, etc.;
- Site landscaping and maintenance;
- Power costs;
- Telephone costs;
- Capital improvements such as painting, new brochure racks, etc.;
- Signage (repairs and maintenance);
- Travel expenses associated with training.

The total cost of operating your centre could range from some $10,000 for a small centre with a limited operating season to more than $30,000 for a larger centre that operates from mid-May through Thanksgiving.

We will discuss funding for employee wages first and then explore other sources of funds for operating your Visitor Information Centre.

6.1 Employment Funding Programs

Some funds may be available for hiring Visitor Information Centre staff through provincial government summer employment programs. These funds are distributed through the Regional Tourism Associations. Visitor Information Centres cannot apply for employment funding directly: they must apply to their Regional Tourism Association which allocates the money they receive from employment programs to the local information centres in their region. As well, only those centres which meet the minimum standards for the Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality Program are eligible to receive this employment funding.

Each Regional Tourism Association uses a different approach to determine how much employment funding each local Visitor Information Centre will receive. In some regions, each centre gets an equal amount; in others the money is allocated on the basis of visitor statistics from the previous year and the need for some centres to have a longer operating season/hours than others because of the visitor requirements in their area.

6.2 Grants From Municipalities

As discussed earlier in the organization section, the municipality itself might be the sponsoring organization or you can approach the municipal council for funding support or to provide various services.

If you are making a case to the municipality for supporting your VIC, remember that one of the Centre's primary functions is to encourage visitors to stay in your community and spend money. This translates into more revenues for local businesses, more employment in the community, and ultimately a greater tax base for the municipality. Thus, the municipality can obtain a direct return on any investment they make in the VIC.

In addition to direct funding, the municipality might be able to assist in the following ways:

- Provide a building for the centre;
- Provide staff for both exterior and interior maintenance;
- Pay the phone and power bill;
- Cover the centre's insurance under the municipality's policy;
- Pay for capital additions and major renovations, or have the municipality's work crews do this work;
- Provide and maintain signage.

6.3 Memberships

You may want to consider a membership program in the VIC for businesses in your community. Members would receive a preferred level of services at the VIC. These might include such things as:

- A photo lure display of members' businesses;
- Rights to display brochures in the members' feature display rack;
- Rights to give staff at the Centre special presentations on their products and services;
- Listings on a local map that the VIC hands out to visitors;
- Listings in a local directory of member services which is given out to visitors.

6.4 Other Revenue Sources

Visitor Information Centres have not traditionally been seen as facilities that can generate their own revenues, but there are, in fact, many ways in which a local VIC can generate revenues to help cover operating costs. This is going to become more and more important as the availability of funding from governments at all levels continues to decline.

We have provided a list of suggestions below, but there are many other opportunities available. Just use your imagination.

Challenges come with many of these revenue generating ideas. Most will require that the Centre handle money, which means more attention will have to be paid to security and additional policies and procedures for handling money will have to be put in place.

Merchandising

Get together with your local business community and develop a logo or image. You may want to use something which is unique to your community and has particular meaning to visitors. Copyright the logo, and then establish a line of merchandise using the logo, including such things as T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, pins, and spoons. You should keep the items relatively inexpensive but of good quality/value. It is best to get some professional help with the design and production of the merchandise; perhaps there is a local business that can donate these services.

Sell the merchandise in the VIC and direct the profits back to the operation of the Centre. You may also want to permit other businesses to sell this merchandise, in which case you should make sure that some portion of their profit is contributed to the operating costs of the VIC.

Other merchandise that you could develop and sell might include:

- Postcards;
- Prints and hasty-notes designed by local artists;
- Posters, e.g. Baddeck has developed a poster of the community which is sold in their Visitor Information Centre;
- Books on the local area;
- Pictorial guides/souvenirs on the local area;
- Jams, jellies, and other local foods.

Make sure that the products you sell are locally (Nova Scotia) made or have some value-added from within Nova Scotia.

Displays of Local Merchandise

If your Visitor Information Centre has sufficient space, you could build some display cases for local merchandise or arts/crafts (what about underneath the counter?). You could charge the merchants/artists for the space on a weekly or monthly basis or even sell the merchandise for them and receive a commission.

You might also use the same approach with pictures/photographs taken by local artists. Display them on the wall with a sign indicating where they can be purchased or sell them through the VIC.

Raffles

A number of local Visitor Information Centres have raffles every year, perhaps for a quilt or a model of the Bluenose, which can be donated by a local community group or service club. You should use a soft sell approach to sell tickets to visitors, but usually a display of the prize and a clear sign that raffle tickets are for sale will elicit some interest, or your staff can be instructed to draw visitors' attention to the raffle.

Photos of Local Tourist Businesses

Local tourist businesses, particularly accommodations, frequently want to display pictures of their properties in the information centre so as to attract customers. Why not offer them the opportunity to display photos of their property - for a small fee, say $50 or $100 a season? You should establish some guidelines for the photographs (size, must be framed, etc.) and perhaps a limit on the number you can display due to space restrictions. Be sure to let all of the businesses in your area know that they have the opportunity to place pictures in the information centre, and that space will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis.

Acting as an Agent for Local Sightseeing Businesses

Visitors will frequently come into a VIC looking for something to do. Why not act as an agent for local sightseeing businesses and tours and sell the tickets directly to the visitor, taking a commission from the operator? You will need to make sure you have all the details on the business, times, cancellation policies, etc. and a detailed description of the product you are selling as well as where the visitor has to go. In addition, you will have to communicate with the business frequently to make sure the tour is still running and is not full. You will also need a procedure for reimbursing the business for the tickets you have sold.

A commission of 10% - 20% of the ticket price would not be out-of-line. Selling tickets in the VIC will probably help the sightseeing business get more customers, since it is sometimes difficult for visitors to find out about these opportunities.

6.5 Sponsorships

Another source of revenue or services is sponsorship, either by businesses or by community groups and associations. However, care should be taken to ensure that any sponsorship is tastefully done and also that it does not create a situation where the bigger businesses end up owning the information centre because they have the funds available to be major sponsors.

We suggest that the best source for sponsorships might be businesses that are not directly involved in tourism but would benefit from the increased profile that might be derived from sponsoring the Information Centre. Don't forget that a significant percentage of your visitors are likely to be local area residents looking for information either for themselves or for visiting friends and relatives.

Here are some suggestions for possible sponsorships:

- Get the local landscaping company or nursery to landscape your site or provide and maintain flower boxes/planters, etc. Then display a tasteful plaque indicating "Landscaping provided by . . . ";

- Have the local service club take care of site maintenance;

- Arrange for a local craftsperson to build your brochure racks or display case, and install a small plaque thanking them for their support;

- Get a local manufacturer to donate the paper supplies you need to operate for the season.

SECTION 7

Development Planning for a Visitor Information Centre

SECTION 7

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR A VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

This section of the manual addresses all of the factors you need to consider if you are planning a new local Visitor Information Centre.

7.1 Market Assessment

If you are thinking of developing a local Visitor Information Centre, you need to give very careful consideration to a number of market-related factors, including:

- Is there a sufficient level of visitor activity in the community to justify a Visitor Information Centre? Remember, Visitor Information Centres will not necessarily attract visitors, though they help keep existing visitors in your community longer. If you only have a few visitors at present, then establishing a Visitor Information Centre may not be the best first route to take in developing your tourism sector. We suggest you take a look at the Community Tourism Planning Guide, another manual in this series, for some ideas on how to develop tourism in your community.

- Is there support from the tourism operators for an information centre? Do you have enough visitor-related businesses to justify a centre? If your community only has a few accommodation businesses, a small downtown area, and a couple of activities, then you should give serious thought to what benefits a Visitor Information Centre could provide and whether it is worth the investment of time and money. We suggest that your community should have at least 15 to 20 tourism related businesses (accommodations, restaurants, attractions, activities, craft/gift shops, and local sightseeing tours) before you consider your own Visitor Information Centre.

- Are the resources available (financial, human, sponsoring organization, business support, etc.) sufficient to build and operate a centre? The availability of money from governments at all levels continues to decline and it is possible that your centre will have to operate with very limited financial support, if any, from governments. Can your sponsoring organization and tourism and business communities sustain the operation of the centre on a long term basis?

- Is there already a Visitor Information Centre nearby? If there is one in the area and/or at the key decision points that visitors pass through when travelling to your community, why not consider making a deal to share this centre and promote your community through it? You could provide one or two staff and contribute to the operating costs. The location and number of Visitor Information Centres in a region should be determined by looking at the visitors' needs, not at where one community ends and another begins. Visitors don't know where municipal boundaries are and don't really care, as long as they get the information and services they need. Having three or four Visitor Information Centres in an area which has only limited tourism businesses does not serve the visitor well and results in an inefficient duplication of services.

Establishing a new local Visitor Information Centre should be instigated by the tourist operators in your community, not by a public agency or government. Only if the tourist operators believe that a Visitor Information Centre is needed and are prepared to support it should you initiate the development planning process.

If you would like to provide visitor information services in your community but do not see a need for a full Visitor Information Centre, why not consider some other options, as follows:

- Approach a local attraction and ask them to provide some basic visitor information services; stock brochures on local facilities and services and display a community map. Make sure that their staff have sufficient knowledge of the local area.

- Arrange with local visitor related businesses, such as accommodation establishments, restaurants, and gas stations, to stock similar information, and train their staff to provide information to visitors.

- Develop an unstaffed Visitor Information Centre or kiosk. This might include a map of the community, a listing of the attractions and visitor services in the area, and a description of things to see and do. You could sell advertising to local businesses to cover the cost and arrange for a pay phone to be located nearby so that visitors could call tourism businesses, or the Check In toll-free number for more information.

7.2 Location and Site Assessment

Your local Visitor Information Centre must be located on a site that is both highly visible to travellers passing through your community and easily reached once they have seen it. Ideally, it should be located on the main road into/through the community. The primary consideration in locating the VIC should be the convenience of the location for the greatest number of visitors.

Should you locate the information centre in the centre of the community or at one end? We suggest you take a careful look at the flow of traffic into your community. If a majority of the traffic enters your community from one direction or there is only one route in and out, then you might want to consider putting your VIC near this entrance. If there are several major routes into the community, this may not be the best location because traffic entering from other routes will only see the VIC as they leave or not at all.

An alternative approach, and probably the preferred one in many smaller communities, is to locate your VIC close to the centre of the action - on the edge of, or at the centre of the downtown business area or at the centre of the tourist area (often the same place). What you don't want to do is locate your VIC so that most visitors won't see it until they have passed the commercial/tourist area. It is much easier to persuade visitors to visit a facility/business that is just ahead or just around the corner than it is to get them to back track to an area they have just come through.

If you have a major attraction in your community, one that most visitors stop at, you may want to locate your VIC next door or even on the same site as this facility. However, make sure that it is visible and easily accessible to visitors who are not visiting the attraction.

You will have to consult with your local municipality as to which sites are appropriately zoned for development as a VIC, and there are probably a number of municipal regulations and bylaws which you must follow. These issues are addressed in detail in Section 9.

The site you select must have sufficient space for the Visitor Information Centre and for parking at least five to ten cars (depending on the size of your community) and at least one motorcoach. (There may be some municipal bylaws which affect the number of parking spaces you have to provide, so check with your local building inspector.) If your site is on a provincial highway, you will need approval from the Department of Transportation and Public Works regarding the entrance/exit and their visibility to passing traffic. These requirements can make your site unsuitable, so you should review potential sites with the Department of Transportation and Public Works early in the planning process.

Stand Alone or Part of Another Facility

Local Visitor Information Centres have traditionally been stand alone facilities, but there is no reason why your centre cannot be part of another facility, as long as it still meets the minimum standards for receiving the Award of Quality designation: a space physically separated from other operations by a solid wall (such as a separate room) and accommodating at least 80% of the floor space. There are local information centres in Nova Scotia that are, for example, located in museums.

As described earlier in this section, you must give careful consideration to your needs and requirements before deciding to build a Visitor Information Centre, and these needs are also important in assessing the option of building a stand alone centre or one that is part of some other facility.

If your community is a major tourist centre with a significant number of tourism-related businesses, and you believe you will have a significant number of visitors to your VIC, then it may be better to have a stand alone facility. However, don't forget to take into account the financial side of things. If capital funds are limited and you think you might have some difficulty generating the revenue needed to operate the information centre, then you should consider carefully a partnership arrangement with another facility because it will definitely provide some economies.

We recommend that you look first at public sector facilities and those that are already in the tourism business, such as the local community museum, a park or an historic site when seeking potential facilities with which to share. The location requirements identified above should still be of prime consideration. You will also want to make sure that there is sufficient space for you in the facility and that there will be no restrictions on things such as hours of operation or signage.

Build, Renovate, or Lease

It is not necessary to build a new facility to house your Visitor Information Centre. You could purchase and renovate an existing building or you could lease a building or space in a building.

Your decision in this respect will be impacted by several factors, as follows:

- Is there a suitable existing building in an appropriate location?
- How much money do you think you can raise for the capital costs, and for the operating costs? Paying rent over a long period of time might be more of a problem than raising the money to build your own facility.
- Is there a local business person or group who might be willing to lease you some space at a very reasonable rate or even donate space for a local Visitor Information Centre?

You may also want to consider developing your VIC in phases: start off in some rented space while you do the detailed planning and fund-raising for your own building.

Signage

When assessing potential sites for your VIC, don't forget that it will be very important to provide good signage on roads leading to the site, as well as on the site itself. There are likely regulations governing the placement of signage in your municipality and you will need to check into them. There are also some provincial regulations impacting signage - they are discussed later in the manual.

7.3 Service Mix Options

What services should your Visitor Information Centre provide? Of course, you are going to provide information for visitors but what type of information, in how much detail, and on what areas of the province? What other services should you provide?

A detailed discussion of the services which should and could be provided at a local Visitor Information Centre is provided in Section 4.

7.4 Sponsoring Organization

It is important to identify a sponsoring organization for your VIC fairly early in the process, since this organization will have to play a major role in the development of the Centre and in seeking capital funding. Various sponsor options are explored in Section 5.

7.5 Project Management

The sponsoring organization(s) should appoint a Project Management Committee to take responsibility for the development of your VIC. The responsibilities of this committee would include:

- Identify potential locations/sites/buildings and select the desired location;
- Determine the mix of services to be provided;
- Liaise with whatever staff support is available to assist with the development process;
- Retain the technical expertise required for the detailed planning/design construction/ renovations, etc.;
- Seek out and obtain commitments for capital funding,
- Supervise/co-ordinate the development of the VIC.

You may need to elicit some staff support to help with the detailed planning and project management, depending on the size of the project and whether you are constructing a new building, renovating, or leasing. This type of assistance might be available through the municipal clerk's office or the office of a business association/Chamber of Commerce, depending on who is sponsoring the VIC.

A list of the types of development and planning approvals you will require is provided in Section 9 of this manual.

7.6 Capital Costs/Budget

You will need to get a fairly good handle on capital budget requirements early in your planning process so that you can decide whether you will be able to raise the necessary funds. Once your Project Management Committee has decided on the preferred approach (build, renovate, or lease), you will want to hire someone with technical expertise to develop a capital budget. Depending on the direction you are taking, various options are available.

If you have decided to construct a new building, you will need an architect - or at least an engineer - to at least approve the drawings for the building. The Architects Act of Nova Scotia requires that an architect be involved in the construction of buildings worth more than $60,000 (It is anticipated that in 2006 the Architects Act will be modified to change this requirement so you should check the current regulations). Typically, buildings that are to be used by the public have to be designed by an architect or engineer so you will need to retain professional expertise of this type. You could have a builder prepare plans for you or use a prefabricated structure, but they would have to be approved by an architect or an engineer. The architect can develop a concept plan for your building, provide you with some preliminary estimates of the likely costs based on the concept plan, and prepare the final design once you have decided to proceed.

If you are only renovating or leasing and simply need to prepare and cost interior plans, you can go directly to a builder with your list of requirements, and get the builder to draw up the detailed plans and cost the project.

Make sure your capital budget includes all of the fixtures and equipment you will need, such as brochure racks, counters, a computer, a cash register, office furniture, signage, etc.

7.7 Capital Funding

You will have to investigate potential sources of capital funding since funding programs change frequently. Ask your Regional Tourism Association, the Regional Development Authority or the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage for an up-to-date list of funding sources. Don't expect that you will be able to get all of the funds required through the public sector - it is quite likely that your group will need to do some fundraising to help cover the capital costs of the VIC.

SECTION 8

Design

SECTION 8

DESIGN

8.1 Size

The size of your Visitor Information Centre should be related to the anticipated number of visitors that it will have to accommodate at any one time, which will be related to the size of your community and the number of visitors the community gets.

As an absolute minimum, you will need 600 square feet of space. This will provide for the following:

- Open space for visitors and displays, brochure racks, etc. of about 300 sq. ft. This means that most of your displays will have to be on the walls to allow room for the visitors. Count on approximately 30 sq. ft. per person of space for this area (people will be moving around and will need this much space), which means you could accommodate a maximum of 10 people in this area at one time.

- Space for the counter(s) and staff, approximately 120 - 150 sq. ft.

- Storage space, approximately 80 sq. ft.

- Washroom space, approximately 100 sq. ft.

If you are going to have two washrooms (see later discussion on washrooms) and/or want to use counselling stations rather than a counter (see later discussion on counters), you will need more open space. In addition, the 600 sq. ft. does not allow for a separate office for the manager, and you may decide that this is important for your Centre.

You can minimize your need to build interior space by putting a covered deck along the front, and/or sides, of the building. This will allow you to put a bulletin board and some weather-resilient displays on the side of the building itself or on the deck. You could also then provide some seating on the deck for visitors waiting to be served during busy times.

8.2 Interior Facilities and Layout

The interior layout of your Visitor Information Centre should be open and uncluttered. You will need three main areas: a counselling/information display area, a washroom, and a storage/administration area. If you are building a new centre, here are several design related factors to consider:

- Wall space will be at a premium so it is a good idea to locate windows high up in the walls and use skylights for natural light where possible.

- The washrooms should be easily accessible from the main entrance, since you will get visitors coming in just for this purpose.

- The administration area should have a clear view of the counselling area, since the manager will be doubling as a travel counsellor and will need to see when she or he is needed.

- A separate literature storage room is ideal, because of the volume of material that can accumulate.

- The building should have two entrances, for safety and security and to permit supplies to be delivered without interfering with the visitors.

The interior of your Visitor Information Centre will require the following elements:

- A counter or several workstations for counselling visitors, with space for at least one computer;
- Brochure racks for displaying materials;
- Storage space;
- Washrooms;
- Wall space for posters, bulletin boards, pictures, etc.;
- Administration space;
- Seating/lounge area (optional).

It is also a good idea to provide a drinking fountain or water cooler and a pay telephone (this could be outside the building). Don't forget that you will also need a smoke detector in the building, a fire extinguisher, and a first aid kit.

Accessibility

Nova Scotia's Building Code Regulations specifies when buildings need to be barrier free. All buildings except houses, certain industrial buildings and those not occupied on a full time basis (seasonal operation of a VIC would count as full time basis) are required to be barrier free. The size of the building and its level of use determines the extent to which you have to be barrier free. This code also applies to any existing buildings which undergo significant changes or renovations. You should assume that your VIC will need to be barrier free, i.e. fully accessible to people with disabilities. This means that your building will need to have:

- Barrier-free access and entrances - may require a ramp;
- Barrier-free washroom(s);
- Barrier-free path of travel including doors, etc.;
- Barrier-free counters for pay phones
- Barrier-free counters - if they are more than 2 metres (6½ feet) long;
- Barrier-free drinking fountains, if you have a drinking fountain.

There are also various other requirements in this code which could affect your building; your architect will be able to advise you of all the requirements.

Counters/Work Stations

Counters need to be located and designed so that they are convenient for counselling visitors. They should be an appropriate height and large enough to lay out a full sized map of the province as well as other documents. You may want to design your counters so there is a plexi-glass cover under which you can place a reference map. You may also want to consider installing display cases on the front of your counters so that you can display local merchandise. It is a good idea to put shelving on the inside of the counters, since storage space is always in short supply.

Counters should be between 36 inches and 40inches high so that they are the right height for counselling visitors. They should be no more than 2 feet 6 inches wide, big enough for a map but not so wide as to put too much space between the counsellor and the visitor. Counters should be at least 4 feet long. Lack of counter space is a problem in many local Visitor Information Centres so you will want to design for as much counter space as possible.

If you are required to have a barrier-free counter, (i.e. if your counter is longer than 6 ½ feet (2m)), then part of your counter will have to be no more than 31 inches high, in order to be accessible to wheelchairs. Alternatively, you could provide a counter that is 34 inches high and this will be appropriate for use by all visitors.

The present system of counters where the travel counsellor is on one side and the visitor on another is not particularly user-friendly and limits the ability of the counsellor to provide assistance in ways other than by talking. If you are building a new centre, consider putting in small work stations that permit the counsellor to stand beside the visitor when studying the literature or looking at websites on the computer. This is much friendlier and more personal. It will also permit the counsellor to move around the room more freely, and to accompany the visitor to the brochure rack or displays. However, it takes more space to accommodate several work stations rather than one counter.

Brochure Racks

There are two basic types of brochure racks available - wall racks and free standing racks. If you have enough space, the free standing racks are preferable because they permit several consumers to look through the rack at once. In addition, more brochures can be displayed in a smaller space.

However, floor space is often at a premium in local Visitor Information Centres and, therefore, wall racks are more frequently used. If you are developing a new centre or building new brochure racks, then racks with a clear plexiglass front are preferable so visitors can see all of the brochures that are displayed. If you have wooden racks, you should make sure that they are designed so that at least the top ⅓ to ½ of the brochure is fully visible.

Standard brochures are approximately 3 ½ inches wide x 8½ inches tall. Thus you will need a space that is at least 4 inches x 9 inches to hold most brochures. Since you want to display the top one third of the brochure, any wooden panels in front of the brochures should be no more than 6 inches high. Brochure racks should be approximately 1½ inches deep to allow a reasonable supply of brochures to be stocked.

Brochure racks should be no more than 5 feet to 5 feet 6 inches high in total, so that visitors can reach the brochures easily. You should probably also provide a row at the top or the bottom for larger brochures and booklets. These spaces should be 9 inches wide by 12 inches high to allow for a full-sized, magazine-style brochure.

It is possible to buy standard brochure racks from suppliers or you can arrange to have them built locally. The Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage publishes guidelines on brochure sizes and specifications and you should review a copy of these before building brochure racks.

One other comment about brochure racks. You don't want to display brochures so they overlap each other on a shelf, since it is very difficult for visitors to see the individual brochures. If you have a serious space problem, give some consideration to rotating the display of brochures on businesses from other parts of the province.

Computer Access

Nowadays, the computer is an essential part of the workplace and also a major source of information for trip planning. You will find that it is essential to have at least one computer for your staff, preferably with high speed Internet access. It would also be useful to have computers available to assist in the counselling process - to show visitors examples of attractions or facilities they might visit, and to search out additional information and details.

As well, many VICs today are providing access to computers for visitors - for trip planning purposes and also for them to check their email while travelling. If you elect to do this, you will need one or more computer stations with Internet access. You may choose to provide this service free-of-charge to your visitors or to ask for a small fee.

Storage Space

You will need a separate storage area to hold stocks of brochures and other literature. This space should be on the same level as the counselling area, i.e. the ground level, because of the need to move material around. The storage area should have shelving along at least two walls.

Washrooms

Labour code regulations require that all employees have access to a washroom. It does not necessarily have to be in the building but it does have to be nearby. As discussed earlier, we recommend that you provide washroom facilities for visitors.

Most centres can manage with one washroom, shared by both sexes, since you are not required to provide a washroom for each sex if your occupancy load (in this case, the number of staff), is less than ten. However, we recommend that you do have two washrooms if you have enough space. The National Building Code determines how many washrooms you require and it is normally calculated based on the size of the building. Your architect or engineer will be familiar with the appropriate regulations for the type of building you are planning.

Washroom facilities must be barrier free. You should provide soap and paper towel dispensers in the washrooms.

Administration Area

Your manager will need an area for doing paper work, etc. and you should also have an area for staff to use for coffee breaks and the like. As mentioned earlier, this area should have a clear view of the main part of the centre. It does not need to be a separate room: an alcove off the counselling area would be suitable. This area should include space for a desk/work area for the manager, with a telephone, filing cabinet, and a computer, as well as a fax machine.

Seating

If you have sufficient space, it is a good idea to include a small seating or lounge area so that visitors can take their time to review brochures. You may want to provide picnic tables outside as well, which can double as a seating area.

8.3 Exterior Appearance

It is important that your Visitor Information Centre be appealing and welcoming to visitors. The building and the site must be in a good state of repair (fresh paint, clean, etc.). The sense of welcome can be accomplished by signage and by pleasant landscaping, perhaps outdoor displays and flower beds. The landscaping could be developed to support themes representative of your area's tourist attractions. For example, a community whose heritage is shipbuilding may incorporate an anchor or sculpture of a ship at the VIC site.

The exterior of the building and the site should be well-lit and open to view from the street, to minimize opportunities for vandalism and maximize staff security.

If you are constructing a new building, make sure your design takes into account the architecture and character of the surrounding area. In most parts of the province, a wood-clad building would be most appropriate, in character with the rest of the community.

8.4 Parking

As discussed earlier under site/location selection, is it very important that you have on-site parking for your Visitor Information Centre. The number of spots you need will depend on the size of your community and may also be governed by municipal bylaws. At a minimum, you should have five parking spaces, plus room for turning, plus space for a recreational vehicle or motorcoach, and a disabled parking space. You should allow 350 square feet per space for cars, 800 square feet for recreational vehicles, and 1,200 square feet for motorcoaches. This includes an allowance for turning and driveways etc.

Don't forget that you will need approval from the Department of Transportation and Public Works (on provincial roads) and/or the municipality for the entrance/exit layout.

8.5 Signage

Signage is a critical element for your VIC and it requires some priority attention. You will need three basic types of signage:

- Highway signs telling travellers on the highway that there is information at the next exit or community. This usually takes the form of a **?** and is provided by the Department of Transportation and Public Works. Note that this **?** sign is only available to Award of Quality Visitor Information Centres. You will have to approach your regional transportation office to arrange for this sign at the closest exit points on provincial highways.

- Directional signage within the community: You should have directional signs within the community so that travellers can find their way to the centre. These signs should be provided **on all routes into the community and at key intersections/turns**. If your community has a tourism signage system, then your sign should be consistent with this system. If not, all you need is a simple sign saying **Information** with appropriate arrows. Your municipality may have some guidelines about the size/colour of signs and you will need their approval for the location and placement of your signs. You may be able to arrange for the municipality to build and erect your signs.

- On-site Signage: You should have a large sign on the site itself, clearly visible to all passing traffic, that says **Visitor Information Centre**. If you have a logo, this should be included on this sign as well as on the directional signs within the community. You will probably need municipal approval to locate your sign. There may be some guidelines as to how big it can be or how far back from the road it has to be.

- Interior Signage: Interior signage including signs for each Travelway area, will also be needed. This was described in detail in Section 4.

If you are an Award of Quality Visitor Information Centre, you will also receive a sign indicating such, to place on your building.

8.6 Expanding or Modernizing

If you are expanding or modernizing your Visitor Information Centre, then you should give careful consideration to all of the design elements discussed above. If your renovations are more than cosmetic, you will probably have to fulfil the requirements of Nova Scotia's barrier-free design legislation, and this may mean some substantial increases in your renovation costs.

You should obtain some expert advice on your renovations, either from a builder or from an architect, depending on the extent of the renovations required.

SECTION 9

Legal, Regulatory and Tax Matters

SECTION 9

LEGAL, REGULATORY, AND TAX MATTERS

This section addresses legal, regulatory and tax matters concerned with the establishment of your visitor information centre. There are a multitude of laws and regulations that affect business and readers should note that the information contained herein is a guide only.

It is strongly suggested that the reader undertake efforts to verify any information on which their business plan is based and not rely solely on the information in this manual. There are areas where you may want to consider retaining the appropriate professional expertise to assist you.

While the information contained in this manual is believed to be accurate, as of the winter of 2005, it is not so warranted. The reader should note that federal, provincial and municipal laws and regulations change frequently and it is recommended that you check with the appropriate authorities, listed in the Appendix, including representatives of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, and your local Business Service Centre (on line www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr or at Access Nova Scotia centres around the province), to obtain up-to-date information on these matters.

There are various legal, regulatory and tax issues that you must consider, particularly if you are building a new Visitor Information Centre. These are addressed in this section of the report.

9.1 Regulations

Municipal Regulations and Bylaws

One of your first steps in developing a new VIC should be to contact your local municipal office and talk to the building inspector. There may be zoning and municipal bylaws which limit or restrict the type of service or business that can be developed in a given area.

A building permit from the municipality is necessary before any construction can begin. There is a fee for the building permit, levied according to the dollar value of the project. As a general rule, building permits are required for all construction, whether renovations or expanding existing buildings or constructing new buildings. You must, therefore, check with your municipality even if you are only planning a minor renovation to an existing property.

Most municipalities in Nova Scotia have some or all of the following regulations that can impact on your development. You should check with your local municipal government office to see which ones you need to be concerned about:

Architects Act and Engineers Act of Nova Scotia

Plans and specifications for larger buildings and developments will require professional services, as legislated in the Architects Act and the Engineers Act of Nova Scotia. This means that your design and construction drawings will need to be stamped, i.e. approved, by professionals, as designated in these acts.

Fire Prevention and Fire Safety

Under the Fire Safety Act, no one can alter, construct, renovate, or reconstruct buildings intended for public occupancy until approval has been obtained from the Office of the Fire Marshal. An application must be submitted to the Office of the Fire Marshal for approval, accompanied by building plans and specifications. The Office of the Fire Marshal is administered through the Public Safety Division, Department of Environment and Labour (www.gov.ns.ca/enla/ofm/)

It is best to contact the Office of the Fire Marshal (Plans Examiner) during the design process rather than wait until you have completed the design work; in this way, you can make any necessary changes before your plans are finalized. If you have a professional design team, they will handle these types of issues.

The Fire Marshal's office will review the building plans and, where necessary, give fire safety advice. Generally it takes at least one month for the Fire Marshal to approve building plans for existing buildings. In the case of new facilities and larger projects, the building plans must be submitted to the Fire Marshal at least two months in advance of the planned start of construction. Once the plans are approved, they may not be altered without consent from the Fire Marshal's Office.

Once construction or renovations are completed, the property must be inspected and final approval given by the Fire Marshal's Office. The Office of the Fire Marshal will conduct this inspection after the local municipality has issued the occupancy permit.

Department of Environment and Labour

As of October 2000, the Departments of Environment, Labour and a number of other regulatory agencies were combined to become the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour with a mandate that encompasses a wide range of issues around the safety of people and property, a healthy environment, employment rights and consumer interests. The Department has a number of divisions dealing with different areas of interest. Check out their website (www.gov.ns.ca/enla) for an up-to-date list of these divisions and the regulations they handle

Water and Sewage Systems

The design of water and sewage systems must be approved by the Department of Environment and Labour (Environmental and Natural Areas Management Division) and the Department must be consulted during the planning stage of your Centre. Inspections and approvals will also be required as these systems are installed.

Water

All water provided to guests from taps, faucets, fountains, or other sources is required to be potable and suitable for human consumption. Approval may be required from the Department of Environment and Labour to construct and operate a water system supplying water to the public.

If the visitor information centre is located in an area where there is a central municipal water system, then the appropriate municipal regulations apply and the operator may not need to contact the Department of Environment and Labour for approval.

There are regulations that require regular testing of water that is available for public consumption. You should check with the Department of Environment and Labour for the regulations that apply to your VIC.

Sewage System

For properties that are not connected to a municipal sewage system, it will be necessary to obtain an approval to install an on-site sewage disposal system from the Department of Environment and Labour before constructing the facility.

In areas where central municipal sewage disposal systems exist, municipal regulations apply and the operator does not need to contact the Department of Environment and Labour for approval.

Other Regulations under the Department of Environment and Labour

The Department of Environment and Labour is also responsible for occupational health and safety, public safety, labour standards, as well as the Office of the Fire Marshal. The Department also administers acts and regulations pertaining to elevators and amusement devices. Specific regulations that would pertain to a visitor information centre include:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act that requires employers to adhere to operational and employee safety standards. A brief overview of this Act and the implications for business operations is provided below.

- Labour standards with respect to minimum wage, employee/employer rights, etc. A Fact Sheet providing general information on the Labour Standards Code is published on the Internet at www.gov.ns.ca/enla/labstand/lstcode/ or you can contact the Labour Standards Division of the Department for more information.

- The Pay Equity Act is administered through the Labour Services Division of the Department of Environment and Labour. Pay equity means *equal pay for work of equal value* and is a concept that bases wages on the value of work performed, regardless of whether a man or woman is doing the job.

- Indoor Air Quality Regulations;

- First Aid Regulations. There is a Guide to First Aid Regulations available at www.gov.ns.ca/enla/ohs/FirstAidGuide.pdf

- Workplace Hazardous Materials Information [WHMIS] Regulations. A guide to these regulations is available through the Environment and Labour website, Publications section, under Public Safety and Occupational Health and Safety.

- The Elevator and Lifts Act requires licensing and inspecting of elevator units by the Public Safety Office, Department of Environment and Labour, including lifts for physically challenged persons.

- The Steam Boiler and Pressure Vessels Act may apply to the facility depending upon the type and size of any steam boilers or pressure vessels utilized.

- Nova Scotia Power Inc. issues permits and conducts inspections under the authority of the Department of Environment and Labour for new or renovated electrical systems in all facilities. An electrical permit is required before any electrical work can be carried out. (It is the responsibility of the contracted electrician to obtain the necessary electrical permits and arrange the inspection.)

  Your local municipality will want to verify that an electrical inspection has been carried out and approved prior to issuing the final occupancy permit.

The Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act

The current Occupational Health and Safety Act became law in 1997, with some significant implications for businesses in Nova Scotia. The Act is comprised of some key elements as described below. It is administered by the Occupational Health and Safety Division, Department of Environment and Labour - information, including a "How to Guide" can be found at www.gov.ns.ca/enla/ohs/

The ***Internal Responsibility System*** concept is the foundation of the Act and, simply stated, places the responsibility of workplace safety on all workplace parties. Workplace parties are defined as anyone connected with a particular workplace, including Employers, Contractors, Constructors, Employees, the Self-Employed, as well as Owners, Suppliers, Architects, Engineers, and Occupational Health and Safety Consultants. The Act states in some detail what the responsibilities (i.e. duties and precautions) of all workplace parties are.

The Act also provides employees with three basic rights. These are:

- **The Right to Know** - each employee is entitled to information on issues that affect the health and safety of the employee or that of another person in the workplace;

- **The Right to Refuse** - employees have the right to refuse unsafe or unhealthy work;

- **The Right to Participate** - employees can participate on health and safety committees or be an Occupational Health and Safety Representative, report unsafe conditions, and voice their concerns or opinions on any issue that affects their health and safety, or that of the workplace.

The Act states that a business employing five or more people on a regular basis is required to prepare a written ***Occupational Health and Safety Policy*** indicating that the employer is committed to occupational health and safety, and that the employer will co-operate with employees in striving to meet the goal of a safer and healthier workplace.

A business employing twenty or more people on a regular basis is required to establish and maintain a written ***Occupational Health and Safety Program*** including provisions for:

- The training and supervision of employees;
- The preparation of written work procedures relative to health and safety;
- The establishment of a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or selection of a Health and Safety Representative, where one is required;
- The establishment of a hazard identification program and an accident/incident investigation system;
- The maintenance of records and statistics;
- The monitoring of the implementation and effectiveness of the program.

It is recommended that you obtain a copy of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and any other regulations that may pertain to you.

Department of Transportation and Public Works

The Department of Transportation and Public Works has a number of regulations that govern the types of signs that can be erected particularly along controlled access highways. As a Visitor Information Centre, you may be able to get a ? Service Symbol on the sign approaching the exit from the 100 series highway to your community. Contact your regional office of Transportation and Communications for more information.

There are no provincial policies in place, as of winter 2005, regarding the placement of advertising signage within the right-of-ways of secondary roads. However, there may well be municipal regulations regarding the placement of signage for your VIC and you are advised to contact your local municipality regarding policies for advertising signage along public roadways.

You should also adopt a neighbour-friendly approach and seek permission of abutting landowners before placing any signs, as well as taking measures to avoid blocking existing traffic signage or impede sight-distances. Placing signage on utility poles is strongly discouraged as it presents safety issues for service and maintenance personnel.

On-Premise Signage

Tourism operators wishing to place signs on their own premises should contact their local municipality for guidelines and regulations. As with other types of signs, operators should consider adopting a neighbour-friendly approach and consult with abutting landowners before placing of any signs.

For businesses, including VICs, located adjacent to provincial roads, there are regulations that apply to on-premise signage. Signs can only advertise business that is conducted on the premises; any new signs have to go either within 10 m of the main entrance point to the property (e.g. parking lot) or not further than 100 m from the main entrance to the building. Signs must be set back a minimum of 10 metres from the right of way for controlled access highways. Signs can be no larger than 28 square metres in area if there is only one business; if there is more than one business operating in the premises, the signs can be up to 51 square metres in size.

As with all regulations, those may change from time to time. You should check with the Department of Transportation and Public Works, as well as your local municipality, for up-to-date regulations affecting the type and placement of signs for your VIC.

9.2 Employment Taxes

As an employer, you are responsible for deducting income tax, Canada Pension Plan (CPP) contributions, and Employment Insurance (EI) premiums from the wages and salaries you pay your employees. You are also responsible for remitting these amounts on a monthly basis to the Receiver General for Canada, along with your share of CPP contributions and EI premiums that you pay throughout the year on your employees' behalf. You are also required to report these amounts on an annual information return and prepare annual T4 information slips for your employees.

The sponsoring organization(s) will usually be responsible for the payroll function of your Visitor Information Centre, although the regional tourism association may also play a role in some cases. Check with your regional tourism association.

The Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for ensuring these requirements are met. The department handles enforcement and some collection activities related to payroll deductions, prepares the Payroll Deduction Tables used by employers for calculating deductions, and determines employee insurable earnings for Employment Insurance and pensionable employment for the Canada Pension Plan.

Contact your local Canada Revenue Agency office for more information and a New Employer kit.

Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation

Under the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Act, various industries are mandated to pay for compensation coverage to protect employees from income loss and medical expenses resulting from job-related industries. Under the Act, you are required to pay premiums based on the dollar value of the wages you pay your employees. Generally, this applies unless you employ less than three persons, in which case you are exempt. However, there are exceptions and you should contact the the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board (www.wcb.ns.ca)for additional information regarding the specific premiums applicable to you, and a copy of the registration form.

9.3 Other Taxes

Harmonized Sales Tax

The harmonized sales tax (HST) is a 15% value-added tax which replaces the former retail sales tax and GST in Nova Scotia. The HST is also applied in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. (The remaining provinces and territories utilize a separate retail sales tax and the GST).

If your VIC includes a retail element such as a craft shop, the Centre is required to charge the HST on all items sold including souvenirs, crafts, etc. However, VICs are not required to collect the HST on these items unless their annual sales revenues are in excess of $30,000 in a 12 month period. As with other types of businesses, however, VICs may also voluntarily register for and collect HST. The advantage of doing this is that you can claim a credit (called an input tax credit) to recover the HST you paid for expenses and purchases used for the VIC.

If you need to register for the HST, Contact the Canada Revenue Agency either in person, via phone (1-800-959-5525), mail or through the on-line business registry at www.businessregistration-inscriptionenterprise.gc.ca

HST Rebates for Visitors from Outside Nova Scotia and Canada

If your VIC includes a retail store, nonresident visitors (non-Canadian) may be eligible for an HST rebate on goods purchased and removed from Canada. VIC operators are encouraged to have the necessary rebate forms available for customers.

Similarly, a Canadian (non-Nova Scotian) visitor may get a rebate on the province's 8% portion of the HST, but only if the visitor can demonstrate that they have paid the appropriate retail sales tax for the item in their home province.

Shipping of Goods Outside Nova Scotia

If you ship retail items to customers outside Nova Scotia (to provinces other than New Brunswick or Newfoundland and Labrador), you will only have to charge the 7% Goods and Services Tax (GST), since these provinces have not harmonized their sales taxes. If you ship to New Brunswick or Newfoundland and Labrador, however, you must still charge the HST.

Goods shipped to customers outside Canada are zero-rated and thus no tax needs to be charged.

Business Number Registration

The federal government business numbering system, or BN, is a numbering system designed to simplify the way businesses deal with government. When you start a business and open one or more Canada Revenue Agency accounts (e.g. Payroll, HST/GST), you will automatically be assigned a unique Business Number which identifies you and the various accounts you have. This streamlined system allots you one number only with which to deal with the federal government, replacing the multiple numbers that businesses required in the past. You can register for a BN online at www.cra-arc.gc.ca/business and then following the links to business account registration.

Businesses that register for the BN will obtain one-stop business services from Revenue Canada, including new business registration, adding new accounts, updating account information, and account enquiries.

Contact the Canada Revenue Agency for a copy of the registration application form and guide or register on-line. You may also register by phone, in person, by mail, or by fax.

9.4 Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act

In January 2004, the federal government implemented the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPED). This piece of legislation is applicable to all organizations, including all private sector businesses and outlines the responsibilities of an organization relating to personal information collected and stored through the course of normal business activities.

The primary purpose of the Act is to ensure that the privacy of individual consumers is respected in that any personal information, including that relating to age, name, income, social status and credit records; is used for legitimate commercial purposes only and is stored or maintained in a secure fashion.

Following is a basic overview of PIPED[3]:

- If your business wants to collect, use or disclose personal information about people, you need their consent, except in a few specific and limited circumstances.
- You can use or disclose people's personal information only for the purpose for which they gave consent.
- Even with consent, you have to limit collection, use and disclosure to purposes that a reasonable person would consider appropriate under the circumstances.
- Individuals have the right to see the personal information that your business holds about them, and to correct any inaccuracies.
- There's oversight, through the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, to ensure that the law is respected, and redress if people's rights are violated.

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[3] See: http://privcom.gc.ca/information/guide_e.asp

It is recommended that organizations develop in-house policies and procedures relating to the retention of personal information. Many businesses have now taken steps to include their privacy policy in their company literature and have it prominently displayed on company brochures, websites, etc.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner has an online guide to PIPED and a number of fact sheets for businesses available through their website, which can be viewed at http://www.privcom.gc.ca; or by contacting the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada at 1-800-282-1376.

9.5 Insurance

Insurance is a very important element in protecting your sponsoring organization. The main types of insurance you should be aware of are:

- *Property or Fire Protection Insurance* is the most basic form of insurance. It protects property and buildings in case of fire.
- *General Liability Insurance* is insurance to cover claims made against your business for such things as bodily injury occurring on your property. This insurance is commonly known as third-person liability insurance.
- *Stock Coverage* is protection for any inventory you hold for resale (i.e. retail items such as crafts and souvenirs).

As the operator of a Visitor Information Centre, the insurance premiums you pay per year will depend upon the specific types and levels of coverage you need.

If the municipality is involved in the operation of your Visitor Information Centre, or owns your building, you can probably arrange for coverage through their policy.

If not, talk to an insurance agency regarding the specific amount and types of insurance you should carry. Membership organizations such as the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia (TIANS) may be able to provide you with access to cheaper group insurance rates than those which you could obtain on your own.

SECTION 10

The Future

SECTION 10

THE FUTURE

The growth in the use of the Internet for travel-related information and bookings is expected to continue to impact the delivery of information services by destinations. As mentioned earlier, today's visitors are arriving at their destination with significantly more knowledge and information than they did in the past. This has two main implications - there could be less of a need for visitor information services at the destination and the type of information being sought by visitors at the destination is changing. Visitors are looking for more in-depth knowledge, insights into unique experiences that are available to them - ways to experience the essence of the destination. This means that VIC staff will require more training - not only on in-depth product knowledge (for the local area, the region and the province as a whole) but also in how to respond to the customer and to meet their expectations and demands.

Nova Scotia's Vision for Tourism - 100% revenue growth by 2012, will also result in changes in the delivery of visitor information services in the province. As mentioned earlier, there is an increased focus on 'selling' the visitor or potential visitor - on encouraging them to visit and extend their stay by providing them with the right information, by exploring their interests and having the knowledge and tools to respond to these interests with suggestions for things to see and do.

Future VICs will be expected to make increasing use of the Information Highway, with high speed Internet access for counsellors as well as visitors. And, there is increasing demand for visitor access to computers so that they can do their own research and also check email messages.

In future, you may also see more use of Internet-based kiosks that can provide visitors with direct access to selected web sites. These types of kiosks are already in use in some destinations. They are either connected live to the Internet or the content is loaded onto the kiosk's hardware and updated periodically. In some cases, these kiosks are provided in manned information centres to supplement the services of a travel counsellor. Or, they can be made available as part of an unmanned information centre or when staff resources are not available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Ms. Lynne Perry, Executive Director, South Shore Tourism Association;
- Ms. Sally Anderson, Executive Director, Metropolitan and Area Tourism Association;
- Ms. Cheryl Corkum, Manager, Lunenburg Tourist Bureau;
- Ms. Joan Foran, Manager, Mahone Bay Visitor Information Centre.

APPENDIX I

Job Descriptions for Provincial Travel Councellor

APPENDIX I

JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR PROVINCIAL TRAVEL COUNSELLORS

POSITION: Travel Counsellor

Position Scope: *The Travel Counsellor provides current, high quality information and reservation services for the travelling public. The Travel Counsellor must have strong customer service skills to "sell" the province utilizing literature and information to make an economic impact on the tourism industry.*

Functions and Responsibilities:

- Travel counselling at the counter, by telephone and mail enquiries, utilizing customer service skills to sell the province and close the sale.
- Be competent in skills introduced at travel counsellor training programs and implement them when travel counselling.
- Be responsible for making reservations for the travelling public utilizing the Check In reservation and information system.
- Take initiative on an ongoing basis to learn as much as product knowledge as possible on the tourism industry in Nova Scotia.
- Be aware that quality service is expected at all times, and value added and sales are integral to travel counselling.
- Stock literature racks as required.
- Maintain visitor statistics.
- Participate in training programs sponsored by the Province and any other training deemed necessary.
- Other duties as may be assigned by the Supervisor or Manager of Visitor Services and Research.

Qualifications: A sound knowledge of Nova Scotia's attractions, history, geography and culture; excellent communication and interpersonal skills, experience in a customer service/retail environment. Computer proficiency, problem solving skills, experience in a team environment. Language skills, i.e., French, German, Spanish, would be an asset. Certification in First Aid, WHMIS, SuperHost and Certification as a Tourism/Visitor Information Counsellor are assets.

APPENDIX II

List of Contacts

APPENDIX II

LIST OF CONTACTS

Tourism Division - Tourism Development
Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage
1800 Argyle Street, 6th floor
Halifax, NS
B3J 2R5
Tel: 424-5000
Fax: 424-0629
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/dtc

Tourism Division - Tourism Marketing
Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage
1800 Argyle Street, 6th Floor
Halifax, NS
B3J 2R5
Tel 424-5000
Fax: 424-2668
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/dtc

The Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council
World Trade and Convention Centre
Suite 603, 1800 Argyle Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3N8
Tel: 424-0048
Fax: 424-0723
Website: www.nstpc.com

Service Nova Scotia & Municipal Relations
Access Nova Scotia
Toll free: Throughout Province:
1-800-670-4357
Website: https://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr
One-stop shopping for government programs and services. Maintain database of contacts for government departments in each region regarding appropriate permits, etc. Also contact for new Nova Scotia Business Registry.

Regional Access Nova Scotia Offices:

Access Nova Scotia - Amherst
Superstore Mall
126 South Albion St.
Amherst, NS B4H 2X3

Access Nova Scotia - Antigonish
20 St. Andrew's St.
Antigonish, NS B2G 2L4

Access Nova Scotia - Bridgewater
77 Dufferin Street
Bridgewater, NS B4V 2W8
Tel: 1-800-670-4357

Access Nova Scotia - Halifax
West End Mall
6960 Mumford Rd.
Halifax, NS B3L 4P1

Access Nova Scotia - Kentville
28 Aberdeen Street
Kentville, NS B4N 2N1
Tel:1-800-670-4357

Regional Access Nova Scotia Offices (Cont'd):

Access Nova Scotia - Port Hawkesbury
218 MacSween St., Ste. 22
Provincial Building
Port Hawkesbury, NS

Access Nova Scotia - Sydney
Moxham Centre
380 King's Rd.
Sydney, NS B1S 1A8

Access Nova Scotia - Truro
35 Commercial Street, Suite 101
Truro, NS B2N 3H9

Access Nova Scotia - Halifax
West End Mall
6960 Mumford Road
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3L 4P1

Access Nova Scotia - Dartmouth
Superstore Mall
650 Portland Street
Dartmouth, NS B2W 6A3

Access Nova Scotia - Yarmouth
Provincial Bldg.,
10 Starrs Rd., Ste. 127
Yarmouth, NS B5A 2T1

Canada/Nova Scotia
Business Service Centre
1575 Brunswick Street
Halifax, NS
B3J 2G1
Tel: 426-8604
Fax: 426-6530
Toll free: 1-800-668-1010
Information on federal and provincial government programs and funding assistance under the Community Business Loan Program.

Nova Scotia House of Assembly- Office of Legislative Council
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/legc/

Statutes of Nova Scotia

Government Departments

Federal Government

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)
1801 Hollis St., Suite 600
P.O. Box 2284, Station M
Halifax, NS B3J 3C8
Tel: 426-6743
Fax: 426-2054
Toll free: 1-800-565-1228
Website: www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca

Business Development Bank of Canada
Cogswell Tower - Scotia Square, Suite 1400
Halifax, NS B3J 2Z7
Tel: (902) 426-7850
Fax: (902) 426-6783
Toll free: 1-888-463-6232
Website: www.bdc.ca

Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC)
55 Metcalfe Street, Suite 600
Ottawa, ON
K1P 6L5
Tel: 613-946-1000
Website: www.canadatourism.com

Canada Revenue Agency
Business Services
Website: http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca
Payroll, GST/HST
Business Account Registration
Corporations (taxation)
Sole Proprietorships/Partnerships

Canada Revenue Agency
Tax Services Offices:
Halifax
Ralston Building
1557 Hollis St.
P.O. Box 638
Halifax, NS B3J 2T5
Fax: (902) 426-7170

Sydney
47 Dorchester St.
P.O. Box 1300
Sydney, NS B1P 6K3
Fax: (902) 564-3095

Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation
Commerce Tower, 3rd floor
15 Dorchester St.
Sydney, NS B1P 6T7
Tel: 564-3600
Fax: 564-3825
Toll free: 1-800-705-3926
Website: www.ecbc.ca

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Maritimes)
P.O. Box 1035
Dartmouth, NS B2Y 4T3
Tel: (902) 426-3760
Fax: (902) 426-5995
Website: www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Industry Canada
Corporations Directorate
365 Laurier Avenue West, 9th floor
Jean Edmonds Tower South
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0C8
Tel: 1-866-333-5556
Fax: (613) 941-0601
Website: www.corporationscanada.ic.gc.ca

Industry Canada
Competition Bureau
50 Victoria St.
Gatineau, PQ
K1A OC9
Tel: 1-800-348-5358
Fax: (819) 997-4282
Website: http://cb-bc.gc.ca

Industry Canada
NUANS Search System
C/O NUANS Administrator
Hewlett-Packard Canada
P.O. Box 13000
100 Herberg Rd.
Kanata, ON
K2K 2A6
Website: www.nuans.com

Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada
112 Kent St.
Place de Ville, Tower B - 3rd floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 1H3
Toll free: 1-800-282-1376
Tel: (613) 995-8210
Fax: (613) 947-6850
Website: www.privcom.gc.ca
Personal Information & Protection of Electronic Documents Act

Statistics Canada (Atlantic Office)
1741 Brunswick Street
Box 11, 2nd Floor
Halifax, NS B3J 3X8
Toll free: 1-800-263-1136
Website: www.statcan.ca
Population data, Canadian Travel Survey, International Travel Survey.

Transport Canada, Marine Safety
Tower C, Place de Ville
330 Sparks St.
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0N8
Tel: (613) 990-2309
Website: www.tc.gc.ca/marinesafety
Navigable Waters Protection Program
Office of Boating Safety

Transport Canada (Atlantic Region)

Dartmouth:
P.O. Box 1013
45 Alderney Drive
Dartmouth, NS B2Y 4K2
Tel: 426-7795

Port Hawkesbury:
811 Reeves St.
Shediac Plaza
P.O. Box 2012
Port Hawkesbury, NS B0E 2V0
Tel: (902) 625-0803

Sydney:
196 George St.
Federal Arts Bldg., 2nd floor
Sydney, NS B1P 1J3
Tel: (902) 564-7002

Yarmouth:
248 Pleasant St.
P.O. Box 850
Yarmouth, NS B5A 4K5
Tel: (902) 742-6860
Website: www.tc.gc.ca/atl/

St. John Ambulance Training Offices
Headquarters for Nova Scotia Council
88 Slayter Street
Dartmouth, NS B3A 2A6
Tel: 463-5646
Fax: 469-9609
Website: www.stjohnambulance.ns.ca

Canadian Red Cross
1940 Gottingen Street
Halifax, NS B3J 3Y2
Tel: (902) 423-3680
Fax: (902) 422-6247
Website: www.redcross.ca
First Aid, Water Safety courses.

Provincial Government

Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture & Fisheries - Food Safety Section (Halifax)
PO Box 2223
Halifax, NS
B3J 3C4
Tel: (902) 424-1173
Fax: (902) 424-3948
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf

Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture & Fisheries - Food Safety Section (Truro)
P.O. Box 550
Truro, NS
B2N 5E3
Tel: (902) 893-7473
Fax: (902) 893-6531
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 698
Halifax, NS
B3J 2T9
Tel: 424-5935
Fax: 424-7735
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/natr

Service Nova Scotia & Municipal Relations
1505 Barrington St., 9th Floor, South
PO Box 2271
Halifax, NS
B3J 3C8
Tel: 424-5528
Fax: 424-1298
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr

Nova Scotia Department of Environment & Labour
5151 Terminal Road
PO Box 2107
Halifax, NS
B3J 3B7
Tel: 424-5300
Fax: 424-0503
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/enla/
Public Safety Division
Occupational Health & Safety Division

Nova Scotia Office of Economic Development
P.O. Box 2311
14th floor South, Maritime Centre
1505 Barrington St.
Halifax, NS
B3J 3C8
Tel: (902) 424-0377
Fax: (902) 424-7008
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/econ

Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (Central Office):
1690 Hollis St., 6th floor
P.O. Box 2221
Halifax, NS B3J 3C4
Tel: 1-877-269-7699
TTY: (902) 424-3139
Fax: 424-0596
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/humanrights

Nova Scotia Labour Standards
5151 Terminal Road, 7th floor
P.O. Box 697
Halifax, NS
B3J 2T8
Tel: 1-888-315-0110
Fax: 424-0648
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/enla/labstand

Nova Scotia Alcohol and Gaming Authority
40 Alderney Dr.
P.O. Box 545
Dartmouth, NS B2Y 3Y8
Tel: 424-6160
Fax: 424-4942
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/aga

Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board
Motor Carrier Division
1601 Lower Water Street, Suite 300
P.O. Box 1692
Halifax, NS
B3J 3P6
Tel: (902) 424-3588
Fax: (902) 424-3919
Website: http://www.nsuarb.ca

Nova Scotia Workers Compensation Board
Main Office (Halifax)
5668 South Street
P.O. Box 1150
Halifax, NS
B3J 2Y2
Tel: 1-800-870-3331 (Halifax)
Website: www.wcb.ns.ca

Nova Scotia Workers Compensation Board
Branch Office (Sydney)
336 Kings Rd., Suite 117
Sydney, NS
B1S 1A9
Tel: 1-800-880-0003
Website: www.wcb.ns.ca

Office of the Fire Marshal
Nova Scotia Environment & Labour
5151 Terminal Rd., 6th Floor
P.O. Box 697
Halifax, NS
B3J 2T8
Tel: 1-800-559-3473
Fax: (902) 424-3239
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/enla/ofm

Nova Scotia Transportation & Public Works
1672 Granville St.
PO Box 186
Halifax, NS B3J 2N2
Tel: 424-2297
Fax: 424-0532
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/tran

Provincial Tax Commission
P.O. Box 755
1505 Barrington St.,
8th floor, Maritime Centre
Halifax, NS B3J 2V4
Toll free: 1-800-565-2336
Tel: 424-6300
Fax: 424-0602
Web: www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/taxcomm

Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stock Companies
PO Box 1529
Halifax, NS
B3J 2Y4
Tel: 1-800-225-8227
Fax:(902) 424-4633
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/rjsc
Registration of company and NUANS search of business name.

Nova Scotia Museum
Website: www. museum.gov.ns.ca

Educational/Training Resources

Cape Breton University
P.O. Box 5300
1250 Grand Lake Road
Sydney, NS B1P 6L2
Toll Free: 1-888-959-9995
Tel: 539-5300
Fax: 562-0119
Website: www.capebretonu.ca

Dalhousie University
Henry Hicks Academic Administration Building
6299 South St.
Halifax, NS B3H 4H6
Tel: 494-2211
Registrar's Office:
Tel: (902) 494-2450
Fax: (902) 494-1630
Website: www.dal.ca

Mount St. Vincent University (MSVU)
166 Bedford Highway
Halifax, NS B3M 2J6
Tel: (902) 457-6117
Fax: (902) 457-6498
Website: www.msvu.ca

Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) Admissions
P.O. Box 220
Halifax, NS B3J 2M4
Tel: (902) 491-4911
Toll Free: 1-866-679-6722
Fax: 424-0717
Toll Free:1-866-329-6722
Website: www.nscc.ns.ca

Saint Mary's University
923 Robie Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3
Tel:(902) 420-5400
Website: www.stmarys.ca

Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council
1099 Marginal Road, Suite 201
Halifax, NS B3H 4P7
Tel: (902) 423-4480
Fax: (902) 422-0184
Website: www.tourismhrc.com

INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS/ SECTOR ASSOCIATIONS

National & International Organizations/ Associations

Canadian Association of Foodservice Professionals
1644 Bayview Ave., Ste.1219
Toronto, ON M4G 3C2
Tel: (416) 422-3431
Fax: (416) 421-1598
Website: www.cfsea.com

Canadian Culinary Federation (CCF)
700-1281West Georgia St.
Vancouver, BC V6E 3J7
Tel: (604) 681-6087
Fax: (604) 688-5749
Website: www.ccfcc.ca

Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association (CRFA) - Atlantic Office
5121 Sackville St., Ste. 201
Halifax, NS B3J 1K1
Tel: (902) 425-0061
Fax: (902) 422-1161
Website: www.crfa.ca

Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC)
803-130 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON
K1P 5G4
Tel: 613-238-3883
Fax: 613-238-3878
Website: www.tiac-aitc.ca/

Provincial Sector Organizations/ Associations

Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia (TIANS)
1099 Marginal Road, Suite 201
Halifax, NS
B3H 4P7
Tel: (902) 423-4480
Fax: (902) 422-0184
Website: www.tians.org

Affiliated Associations
(Same address, phone & fax as TIANS)

Campground Owners Association of Nova Scotia (COANS)

Nova Scotia Adventure Tourism Association

Nova Scotia B&B Association

Other Industry Organizations/Associations

Canada Select (Nova Scotia)
1800 Argyle St., Ste. 603
Halifax, NS B3J 2R7
Tel: (902) 424-8929
Fax: (902) 424-0723
Website: www.canadaselect.com

Check In Nova Scotia
2695 Dutch Village Road, Suite 501
Halifax, NS B3L 4V2
Tel: 425-5781
Toll free: 1-800-565-0000
Website: www.checkinnovascotia.com
Nova Scotia Travel Information and Reservations.

Federation of Nova Scotian Heritage
1113 Marginal Rd.
Halifax, NS B3H 4P7
Tel: (902) 423-4677
Toll free: 1-800-355-6873
Fax: 422-0881
Website: www.fnsh.ns.ca

Hotel Association of Nova Scotia (HANS)
P.O. Box 473, Station M
Halifax, NS B3J 2P8
Website: www.novascotiahotels.ca

Nova Scotia Association of Chefs & Cooks
Howe Hall, 6230 Coburg Road
Halifax, NS
Tel: 494-1262

Nova Scotia Restaurant Association
1161 Hollis Street
VIA Rail Station
Halifax, NS B3H 2P6
Tel: 429-5343
Fax: 429-0659

Taste of Nova Scotia
P.O. Box 368
29 Inglis Place, 2nd Floor
Truro, NS B2N 5L5
Tel: 895-3315
Fax 895-1011

Nova Scotia Association of Unique Country Inns
Website: www.uniquecountryinns.com

Regional Tourism Industry Associations

Antigonish/Eastern Shore Tourist Association (AESTA)
RR #1 Musquodoboit Harbour, NS
B0J 2L0
Tel: 889-2362
Web: www.rewardyoursenses.com

Central Nova Tourist Association
P.O. Box 1761, 577 Prince Street
Truro, NS
B2N 5Z5
Tel: 893-8782
Fax: 893-2269
Website: www.centralnovascotia.com

Destination Cape Breton
PO Box 1448
Sydney, NS
B1P 6R7
Tel: 563-4636
Fax: 564-5422
Website: www.cbisland.com

Destination Halifax
1800 Argyle Street, Suite 802
Halifax, NS
B3J 3N8
Tel: 422-9334
Fax: 492-3175
Website: www.destinationhalifax.com

Evangeline Trail Tourist Association (ETTA)
654 West Main St.
Kentville, NS B4N 1L7
Tel: (902) 678-1728
Fax: (902) 679-1396
Toll free: 1-866-260-3882
Website: www.evangelinetrail.com

Pictou County Tourist Association (PCTA)
40 Water St.
P.O. Box 1839
Pictou, NS B0K 1H0
Tel: (902) 485-6151
Fax: (902) 485-4415
Toll free: 1-877-81-OCEAN
Web: www.tourismpictoucounty.com

South Shore Tourist Association (SSTA)
Box1390
Lunenburg, NS
B0J 2C0
Tel: 634-8844
Fax: 634-8056
Website: www.sssta.com

Yarmouth County Tourist Association (YCTA)
Tel: 742-5355
Toll free: 1-866-850-9900
Web: www.aboutyarmouth.com

Regional Development Authorities

Antigonish Regional Development Authority
Farmer's Mutual Insurance Building,
Suite 2-1
188 Main St.
Antigonish, NS B2G 2B9
Tel: 863-3330 Fax: 863-4095
Website: www.antigonishrda.ns.ca

Cape Breton County Economic Development Authority
338 Charlotte Street, 3rd Floor
Sydney, NS B1P 1C8
Tel: (902) 562-2201
Fax: (902) 562-2866
Website: www.cbceda.org

Colchester Regional Development Agency
P.O. Box 181, 966 Prince Street
Truro, NS B2N 5C1
Tel: 893-0140
Fax: 897-1157
Toll free: 1-866-227-6182
Website: www.corda.ca

Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association
35 Church Street, Box 546
Amherst, NS B4H 4A1
Tel: (902) 667-3638
Fax: (902) 667-2270
Website: www.creda.net

Guysborough County Regional Development Authority
P.O. Box 49, 46 Main Street
Guysborough, NS B0H 1N0
Tel: 533-3731
Fax: 533-2064
Toll free: 1-800-355-3731
Website: www.gcrda.ns.ca

Halifax Regional Development Agency
11 Glendale Drive, Unit 9
Lower Sackville, NS B4C 3P2
Tel: 869-4040
Fax: 869-4091 Toll Free 1-800-650-0039
Website: www.hrda.ns.ca

Hants Regional Development Authority
Box 2313
Windsor, NS B0N 2T0
Tel: (902) 798-2284
Enfield Office: (902) 883-3338
http://www.hantscounty.com

Straits Highlands Regional Development Authority
P.O. Box 2200
32 Paint St.
Port Hawkesbury, NS B0E 2V0
Tel: 625-3929
Fax: 625-1559
Website: www.strait-highlands.ns.ca

Kings Community Economic Development Agency
28 Aberdeen Street, Ste. #5
Kentville, NS B4N 2N1
Tel: (902) 678-2298
Fax: (902) 678-2324
Website: www.kingsced.ns.ca

Pictou Regional Development Commission
Business Service Centre
980 East River Road
New Glasgow, NS B2H 3S5
Tel: (902) 752-6159
Toll Free: 1-888-412-0072
Fax: (902) 755-2722
Web: www.wearepictoucounty.com

South West Shore Development Authority
P.O. Box 131
Yarmouth, NS B5A 4B1
Tel: (902) 742-3210
Fax: (902) 742-3107
Website: www.swsda.com

Western Valley Development Authority
P.O. Box 278
86 Atlantic Ave.,
Cornwallis Park, NS B0S 1H0
Tel: (902) 638-8100
Fax: (902) 638-8101
website: www.wvda.com

Travel Trade Organizations

Canada

Association of Canadian Travel Agencies (ACTA)
130 Albert Street, Suite 1705
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4
Tel: 613-237-3657
Fax: 613-237-7052
Website: www.acta.ca

Canadian Bus Association (CBA)
451 Daly Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1N 6H6
Tel: 613-238-1800
Fax: 613-241-4936
Website: www.buscanada.ca

Ontario Motor Coach Association (OMCA)
4141 Yonge Street, Suite 306
Toronto, ON M2P 2A8
Tel: 416-229-6622
Fax: 416-229-6281
Website: www.omca.com

United States

American Bus Association (ABA)
700 13TH St., NW, Suite 575
Washington, DC
20005-5923
Tel: 202-842-1645
Toll free: 1-800-283-2877 (US and Canada)
Fax: 202-842-0850
Website: www.buses.org

American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA)
1101 King St., Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703-739-2782
Fax: 703-684-8319
Website: www.astanet.com

Group Leaders of America, Inc. (GLAMER)
P.O. Box 129
Salem, OH 44460
Tel: 1-800-628-0993
Fax: 330-337-1118
Website: www.glamer.com

International Association of Convention &
Visitor Bureaus
2025 M Street, NW Suite 500
Washington, DC
20036
Tel: 202-296-7888
Fax: 202-296-7889
Website: www.iacvb.org

CrossSphere (formerly NTA)
546 E. Main Street
Lexington, KY
40508
Tel: 606-226-4444
Toll free: 1-800-682-8886
Fax: 606-226-4414
Website: www.crosssphere.com

Travel Industry Association
1100 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 450
Washington, DC
20005-3934
Tel: 202-408-8422
Fax: 202-408-1255
Website: www.tia.org

Travel and Tourism Research Association
(TTRA)
PO Box 2133
Boise, ID
83701-2133
Tel: 208-853-2320
Fax: 208-853-2369
Website: www.ttra.com

United States Tour Operators Association
(USTOA)
275 Madison Avenue, Suite 2014
New York, NY
10016
Tel: 212-599-6599
Fax: 212-599-6744
Website: www.ustoa.com

APPENDIX III

emerit Standards and Certification

APPENDIX III

emerit STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION

The Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council (http://www.tourismhrc.com) is a national partner of the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council and has been actively involved in the development of National Occupational Standards for various occupations in the tourism industry, and is also the certifying body for non-apprenticeable trades in Nova Scotia. As well, the NSTHRC is the local partner for emerit, "Canada's best tourism training tools". emerit offers flexible learning options including on-line accessibility and traditional workbooks. This allows for self-directed learning of specific skill based modules and also permits individuals to challenge full certification.

Standards

Standards presently (2005) exist for 49 occupations. These are listed on the following page.

What are Standards?

Standards are statements outlining the attitude, knowledge, and skills required of an individual in order to be considered competent in an occupation. Standards clarify expectations and can be used to design consistent training, education, and professional development programs.

How are Standards Developed?

The Standard development process is based on the philosophy that the tourism industry must determine its own direction. The individuals best suited to determine the content of the Standards are those directly involved in the occupation. The mandate of the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council is to bring together business, labour, education, and training, and other stakeholders to define the standards and to ensure that they guide education and training.

Standards for a specific occupation become National once seven provinces or territories and one national association validate and accept them.

Who Benefits from Standards?

Eventually, everyone in contact with the tourism industry will benefit from the evaluation of performance in relation to industry Standards. As Standards gain recognition, industry professionals will maintain or increase personal skills, resulting in direct benefits to local and visiting consumers.

National Product List www.emerit.ca

To order please visit www.emerit.ca or contact 1.800.486.9158.

NATIONAL WORKBOOKS

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Bartender	75.00		
Campground Operator	75.00		
Entry Level Cook	75.00		
Food and Bevarage Manger Set	275.00		
Food and Beverage Server	75.00		
Freshwater Angling Guide	75.00		
Front Desk Agent	75.00		
Guest Services Attendant	75.00		
Heritage Interpreter	75.00		
Housekeeping Room Attendant	75.00		
Hunting Guide	75.00		
Local Tour Guide	75.00		
Reservations Sales Agent	75.00		
Retail First Level Manager	75.00		
Retail Sales Associate	100.00		
Sales Manager	75.00		
Special Events Coordinator	75.00		
Special Events Manager	75.00		
Supervisory Skills (set of 4)	275.00		
Tour Director	75.00		
Tourism Essentials	75.00		
Tourism Visitor Information Counsellor	75.00		
Travel Counsellor	75.00		N/A

TRAINER'S GUIDES FOR WORKBOOKS

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Bartender/ Food and Beverage Server	150.00		
Food and Beverage Manager	150.00		
Front Desk Agent	150.00		
Guest Services Attendant	150.00		
Heritage Interpreter	150.00		
Housekeeping Room Attendant	150.00		
Local Tour Guide/Tour Director	150.00		
Reservations Sales Agent	150.00		
Sales Manager	150.00		
Tourism Visitor Information Counsellor	150.00		
Tourism Essentials	150.00		

CAREER PLANNING RESOURCES

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Career Awareness Video	27.50		
Career Expo Manual	45.00		
Career Planning Guide (Updated)	35.00		
The Student's Travel Map: 2002 (Updated)	35.00		
Tourism – A World of Opportunity (CD-Rom)	25.00		

HUMAN RESOURCE BUSINESS TOOLS

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Aboriginal Tourism - A Business Guide	25.00		
Performance First Series:	155.00		
Great Performances	25.00		
Less Talk, More Communication	25.00		
Making Training Work	25.00		
One-on-One Training	25.00		
Predicting Performance	25.00		
Setting the Stage	25.00		
Winning Ways	25.00		
Business Builders Series:	160.00		
Developing an Operational Plan	20.00		
Developing Your Business Profile	20.00		
Getting Your Business Market Ready	30.00		
Management and Labour Relations	30.00		
Managing Your Business Finances	20.00		
Marketing Essentials for Small Business	20.00		
Sales Forecasting	20.00		
Shaping Your Business Strategy	20.00		
HR Tool Kit	195.00		
Performance Paks (ELC,HRA, FDA, FBS, TVIC)	25.00		

OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Bartender	40.00		
Beverage Services Manager	40.00		N/A
Banquet Server	40.00		
Banquet Manager	40.00		
Campground Operator	40.00		
Catering Manager	40.00		
Casino Dealer	40.00		
Casino Slot Attendant	40.00		
Catering Manager	40.00		N/A
Director of Sales and Marketing	40.00		N/A
Door Staff	40.00		
Food & Beverage Manager	40.00		
Food & Beverage Server	40.00		
Foodservice Counter Attendant	40.00		N/A
Freshwater Angling Guide	40.00		
Front Desk Agent	40.00		
Golf Club General Manager	40.00		
Guest Services Attendant	40.00		
Heritage Interpreter	40.00		
Housekeeping Room Attendant	40.00		
Hunting Guide	40.00		
In-room Dining Server	40.00		
Kitchen Helper	40.00		
Line Cook	40.00		N/A
Local Tour Guide	40.00		
Night Auditor	40.00		
Outdoor Adventure Guide	40.00		
Professional Cooking	80.00		
Reservations Sales Agent	40.00		
Retail First Level Manager	40.00		N/A
Retail Sales Associate	40.00		N/A
Sales Manager	40.00		
Ski Area/Resort Occupational Guidelines	85.00		
Small Business Owner/Operator	40.00		
Snowmobile Operations	40.00		
Special Events Coordinator	40.00		
Special Events Manager	40.00		
Supervisory Skills	40.00		
Taxicab Driver	40.00		
Ticket Agent	40.00		
Tour Guide/Director	40.00		
Tour Operator	40.00		
Tourism Small Business Owner/Operator	40.00		N/A
Tourism Trainer	40.00		
Tourism/Visitor Information Counsellor	40.00		
Tourism/Visitor Information Supervisor	40.00		
Travel Counsellor	40.00		
Transferable Skills	40.00		
Wine Service	40.00		

ON-LINE TRAINING

	PRICE	ENG	FRE
Bartender (Bundle)	125.00		
Modules	25.00		
Food and Beverage Server (Bundle)	125.00		
Modules	25.00		
Front Desk Agent (Bundle)	125.00		
Modules	25.00		

For Service Professionals, Standards:

- Identify career paths;
- Identify the skill and knowledge needed
- Enhance the public image of occupations;
- Provide a basis for challenge, self-improvement, and advancement;
- Provide the basis for certification based on competent performance.

For Employers and Owners, Standards:

- Define area where employees must be proficient, which assists in recruiting, training, and development of staff. It is important to understand that Standards are not a training program or a training manual in themselves; they do not specify learning objectives, learning activities or evaluation methods. To serve as a training tool, the Standards need to be translated into a learning experience with detailed objectives, activities, and evaluations.

- They can be used to create job descriptions and conduct performance evaluations, as well as to develop and enhance training programs

- Provide employers with a highly trained workforce, which can increase productivity and decrease costs incurred by staff turnover.

For Educators, Standards:

- Provide the basis for curriculum and program development;
- Identify areas of industry where educational expertise is needed and applicable.

For Students, Standards:

- Promote the tourism/hospitality industry as a viable and fulfilling career choice;
- Identify career options within the industry.

For the General Public, Standards:

- Increase the level of professionalism of employees in the tourism/hospitality industry. This results in a higher level of service to customers and a better image of the industry.

Many Standards are available in a Workbook that is a self-study guide including all the Standards as well as exercises, performance reviews and self-tests. The Workbooks are available through the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council and can be ordered on-line from their web site.

National Certification

What is National Certification?

National Certification is a three step process. Professionals who achieve National Certification will be recognized across Canada for meeting industry requirements in their selected occupation. The candidate must be employed in the occupation and must have achieved a minimum number of hours work experience (varies depending on the occupation) prior to completing certification.

Candidates may challenge the knowledge component (i.e. the written examination) of the process at any time with no prerequisite. Study materials are recommended to assist in achieving optimal results.

The Certification process is as follows:

Step 1: Written Examination

The examination tests the candidate's familiarity with the knowledge component of the Standards. If unsuccessful, re-testing may be arranged. Oral examinations are available in special circumstances. Some certification exams are available on-line.

Step 2: Performance Review

The Performance Review is derived from the Standards and enables the candidate to practice performance skills on-the-job. The candidate is encouraged to practice the skills outlined in the Standards using the Performance Review as a guide. The review can be completed as it best suits the candidate's situation, but it is recommended that a candidate work together with his or her supervisor or a certified peer to complete it. The supervisor/certified peer can provide feedback for those skills which may need improvement.

When the candidate is ready to have his or her performance skills evaluated, the candidate contacts the Certification Team and requests an Industry Evaluation. In addition, the candidate must have a minimum number of hours experience (varies by occupation) before the Industry Evaluation can be conducted.

Step 3: Industry Evaluation

A trained evaluator observes the candidate on-the-job to ensure the candidate possesses the essential competencies of the occupation as established by the industry.

Certification

The Certification Team reviews the file to ensure that all requirements have been met. The successful candidates receive a certificate, a pin, and the Industry Evaluation comments. Unsuccessful candidates receive the Industry Evaluation comments and are encouraged to reapply.

APPENDIX IV

Highlights of a Visitor Information Strategy

NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism Partnership
COUNCIL

December 2003

HIGHLIGHTS OF A VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES STRATEGY

The following document contains the highlights of a comprehensive Visitor Information Services Strategy that was developed over the past two years. It is important to note the following:

- Visitor Information Services represents an excellent opportunity to drive incremental tourism revenues in Nova Scotia.
- Visitor Information Services represents a collection of critical information-based services inclusive of but not restricted to Visitor Information Centers.
- It is critical to first understand and endorse the overall goal of Visitor Information Services as presented below prior to evaluating current services.
- Due to an obvious shortage of resources, there is a need to maximize the productivity of every dollar invested in Visitor Information Services such that this goal is attained.
- There would appear to be an excellent opportunity for the Department of Tourism & Culture, the Tourism Partnership Council's Visitor Information Service Committee and the Regional Tourist Associations to work together and develop regional Visitor Information Service strategies that are complementary and designed to meet each regions individual needs and achieve the overall goal, as presented.

  We encourage you to review the information presented below with these thoughts in mind.

The Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council's Visitor Information Services (VIS) Committee was tasked to develop and implement a five-year Visitor Information Services Strategy for the province of Nova Scotia's Tourism industry. The Strategy is designed to integrate all aspects of Visitor Information Services, including emerging components of this critical part of the marketing process.

Members of the Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council's Visitor Information Services (VIS) Committee who were involved in some way in developing the

Strategy include:

Graham MacNeil - Chair
Shelley Acker
Bob Boyd
Betty d'Eon,
Darlene Grant-Fiander
Sharon Martin
Paul Stackhouse
Jennifer Taylor
Tanya Taylor-White
Ken Tutty
Shelley Webb
Peggy Tibbo-Cameron

The Strategy is based on factual conclusions drawn from extensive consultation and research of our visitors' preferences and existing services. This Strategy includes market-driven recommendations designed to enhance the quality and level of information services, resulting in increased expenditures by our visitors. The Strategy is designed to be a foundation piece of Nova Scotia's tourism marketing program and more importantly, **designed to be a key part of the building process as the industry strives toward its Vision goal of 100% growth in tourism revenues over the next ten years.** Nova Scotia's Vision for Tourism aims to make dramatic advances in Nova Scotia's Tourism development over the next decade. **The Vision is about change that will create the environment for growth in Tourism. It's about thinking differently, not just adapting.** In order to achieve our goal, we must raise the bar on every aspect of Tourism. New thinking is critical to achieving 'real' growth in our industry. We need to think beyond what we've done yesterday and what we're doing today. Vision is about where we want to be tomorrow. And we can realize this Vision if tourism stakeholders including business, labour, governments, and its partners work together to create a Tourism 1st attitude in the development of our industry.

In addition to the Committee's research, a consultant was commissioned to provide independent, third-party recommendations including analyzing the Committee's visitor survey and operators' questionnaire and researching information from other jurisdictions on visitor information services. **The analysis and research provided the basis for many of the recommendations. The 2002 Nova Scotia Visitor Information Centre Study indicated that nearly 90 % of visitors to all VICs are served at 40 VICs - less than half the VICs currently operating in Nova Scotia.** The survey further indicated that it is important to have VICs in major centres and at entry points. **The survey also provided opportunities for increasing our revenue as 8% of VIC users indicated that they would spend more time in NS as a result of their visit to the VIC.**

First and foremost, it is critical that Visitor Information Services continue to be recognized as a vital part of the marketing program and that as such the role of these services cannot be underestimated or overlooked. **Visitor information services must develop a selling emphasis, recommending what visitors want and not just providing information.** Marketing has been described as the "facilitation of exchange" and this committee's recommendation is to develop an integrated VIS platform capable of meeting the expectations of **"tomorrow's"** visitors. Upon review, there already exist, excellent examples of Visitor Information Services (VIS); however, these components are not presented as a cohesive program and can be easily overlooked by visitors looking for visitor information in a central, well-organized, and consolidated manner. **The primary objective over the next five years is to integrate new ideas and tools with the most effective and efficient components of the current services to forge a complementary strategy that drives incremental tourism receipts.** This direction is consistent with the overall industry vision of securing **100% growth in tourism revenues over the next ten years.**

In essence, a Visitor Information Services Strategy implies everything from a well-designed Travel Guide, a visitor-friendly web-site, an effective and efficient central reservation service, and an enlightened staff of hosts who are well prepared to "sell" the province to the world. To do this there is a need to **increase and re-allocate resources such that key result areas (i.e. training) are adequately supported.** The Strategy is people focused and promotes the skills needed to sell the province and encourage longer and return visits. The TIANS Human Resource Council will have a significant role to play in helping to achieve this. Current research confirms that, when planning their trip, 73.6% of VIC users obtain information prior to leaving home. 61% indicated they had used the Internet for information on NS before leaving on their trip. These numbers can only be expected to increase and quickly. Our ability to adapt to technological changes will therefore be of paramount importance.

Paramount to this strategy is a willingness to be forward looking, market-driven and also to do things differently. There appears to be a need to change the emphasis from quantity to quality, from reactive to proactive, and from process driven to market driven.

The recommendations presented in the Strategy are to be phased in over a five- year period versus immediate changes in 2003. There are many aspects of visitor services currently being done well as the 2002 market research suggests. Secondly, there are several projects in the works that will provide excellent direction for VIS most notably in the TPC led E-Marketing Strategy and the industry's Vision process. The intent is not to re-invent the wheel but to ensure it is well coordinated, effective and efficient.

Coordination of efforts between the primary and secondary visitor information providers is also a critical recommendation. For example, locally operated VIC's rely on the services of the Nova Scotia Distribution Centre operated by Tourism and Culture; VIC operators rely on services offered by TIANS to deliver appropriate human resource development opportunities for staff; and the department also coordinates the web-site for the province; Check-ins provides a valuable service as well, as do all of the various special interest groups like Taste of Nova Scotia for example. The Doers and Dreamers' Travel Guide is another leading example of visitor information services. **All of this is Visitor Information from the market's perspective and none of it should be managed from a mutually exclusive perspective.**

The Goal of the Strategy is :

To drive incremental tourism receipts through the implementation of a comprehensive visitor information service strategy that is market-driven, pro-active, year-round and capable of providing efficient and effective assistance to our visitors / customers.
Coupled with the goal are four Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective #1: **Technology -** Develop all major technological tools and resources to optimal status such that the Tourism Industry of Nova Scotia is positioned to maximize the communication of Visitor Information Services through this emerging and dominant channel of communication.

Strategic Objective #2: **Sustainable Visitor Service Programs** - Combine all primary and secondary components of existing Visitor Information Services into a complementary, Twelve month Visitor Information Services Program such that each continues to function on its own but is connected to the overall objective of providing critical and specific information to our target markets, before, during and after their visit to Nova Scotia and at a time and format that meets their needs.

Strategic Objective #3: **A Commitment to effective Human Resource Management** - Ensure complementary Human Resource Management strategies are designed and implemented resulting in an effective and efficient level of service as demanded by the target markets of the Tourism Industry.

Strategic Objective #4: **Visitor Information Centres** - Develop an effective and efficient network of Visitor Information Centres capable of providing a provincial perspective and strategically located throughout the province and managed toward continual improvement.

The majority of the recommendations flow from some form of market research resulting in a **market-driven strategy.**

The primary objective for this first year is to select an implementation committee, to orient the entire industry to the plan, to establish the standard operating procedures necessary for a successful roll-out, and to prepare for the intermediate activity scheduled for years two and three. It is recognized that many of the initiatives may take a number of years and a number of recommendations will be ongoing. Further, as research is completed and triggers change, recommendations will need to be adjusted.

The Visitor Information Services Committee recommends the establishment of a VIS Implementation Committee of the Tourism Partnership Council to develop annual action plans and ensure the implementation of the Strategy, as well as to keep abreast of changing technology and adapt to those changes as necessary.

The intention is to place the implementation of the Strategy and its recommendations in the hands of a VIS Implementation Committee of the Tourism Partnership Council. The role of the Implementation Committee will be to facilitate the implementation of the actions in a phased-in approach. It is also recommended that a continuity of membership from the current committee to the new VIS Implementation Committee be maintained. Therefore, key members of the current Committee would remain on the committee and others with a global view of VIS would be added to the membership. The Committee would adopt a proactive, far-reaching view of VIS; generate Departmental awareness of importance of VIS; inspire Industry buy-in; and establish specific action plans for the strategy for years 2 – 5.

After extensive consultation and research the VIS Committee's objective was to develop a comprehensive Visitor Information Services Strategy designed to be a foundation piece of Nova Scotia's tourism marketing program and, more importantly, designed to be a key part of the building process as the industry strives toward **100% growth in tourism revenues over the next ten years.**

"TO ACHIEVE WHAT WE HAVE NEVER ACHIEVED – WE MUST DO WHAT WE HAVE NEVER DONE."

First and foremost, it is critical that visitor information services be recognized as a vital part of the marketing program and that as such the role of these services cannot continue to be underestimated or overlooked. Visitor information services must develop a selling emphasis, recommending what visitors want and not just providing information. Marketing has been described as the "facilitation of exchange" and this committee's recommendation is to develop an integrated VIS platform capable of meeting the expectations of **"tomorrow's"** visitors. Upon review, there already exist excellent examples of visitor information services; however, these components are not presented as a cohesive program and can be easily overlooked by visitors looking for visitor information in a central, well-organized, and consolidated manner. **The primary objective over the next five years is to integrate new ideas and tools with the most effective and efficient components of the current services to forge a complementary strategy that drives incremental tourism receipts.** This direction is consistent with the overall industry vision of securing **100% growth in tourism revenues over the next ten years.**

This Strategy will result in a shift in focus away from the Visitor Information Centre and away from the common perception that visitor information services are "in-province" marketing initiatives that are the final transaction of the province's marketing and promotion program. **The reverse is in fact closer to the truth.** Current research confirms that, when planning their trip, 73.6% of VIC users obtain information prior to leaving home; 61% indicated they had used the Internet for information on NS before leaving on their trip. These numbers can only be expected to increase and quickly.

In essence, a Visitor Information Services Strategy implies everything from a well-designed Travel Guide, a visitor-friendly web-site, and an effective and efficient central reservation service to an enlightened staff of hosts who are well prepared to "sell" the province to the world. To do this there is a need to **increase and re-allocate resources such that key result areas are adequately supported**.

Paramount to the successful implementation of this Strategy is a willingness to do things differently. There is a need to change the emphasis from quantity to quality, from reactive to proactive, and from process-driven to market-driven.

The recommendations presented below are to be phased in over a five-year period versus all the changes being implemented in 2004. There are many things currently being done well, as the 2002 market research suggests. In 2002, Nova Scotia saw a 2 % increase in visitation and a 17% increase in provincial VIC use. Moreover, there are several projects in the works that will provide excellent direction for VIS, most notably in the TPC-led E-Marketing Strategy. The intent is not to re-invent the wheel but to ensure that the process is well coordinated, effective and efficient.

Coordination of efforts between the primary and secondary visitor information providers is also a critical recommendation. For example, locally-operated VICs rely on the services of the Nova Scotia Distribution Centre operated by Tourism and Culture; VIC operators rely on services offered by TIANS to deliver appropriate human resource development opportunities for staff; the Department also coordinates the web-site for the province; Check In provides a valuable service as well, as do all of the various special interest groups like Taste of Nova Scotia, for example. The Doers' and Dreamers' Travel Guide is another leading example of visitor information services. **All of this is visitor information from the market's perspective and none of it should be managed from a mutually exclusive perspective.**

The re-structuring of Nova Scotia's visitor information services is felt to encompass four key areas:

1. Technology
2. Sustainable Visitor Service Programs
3. Human Resource Management
4. Visitor Information Centres

The primary objective for this first year is to select an implementation committee, to orient the entire industry to the plan, to establish the standard operating procedures necessary for a successful roll-out, and to prepare for the intermediate activity scheduled for years two and three. It is recognized that many of the initiatives may take a number of years and a number of recommendations will be ongoing. Further, as research is completed and triggers change, recommendations will need to be adjusted.

Strategic Objective #1: Technology

Enhance the use of technology as an integral part of VIS to ensure the needs of the visitors are met today and tomorrow.

Short-term (Year 1)

1. Initiate the process of market-driven and visitor-focussed orientation and discovery with those involved in the provincial E-Marketing Strategy to prepare for the intermediate term direction.

Intermediate term (Years 2 and 3)

1. Review and adopt all TPC's E-Marketing recommendations that are in congruence with this overall VIS Strategy.
2. Ensure the provincial web-site provides a visitor information services icon on the home page.
3. The web-site should provide a service that is easy to identify and also capable of high conversions to operators, is well maintained and leading edge, and is inclusive of all visitor information services identified in this document.
4. Ensure the visitors have public access to technology / Internet when visiting the Full Service Level VICs.

5. Enhance links page on Novascotia.com and ensure the importance of site maintenance is promoted throughout the industry.
6. Increase the availability of all provincial literature and regional guides on-line.
7. Research the impact that technology will have on VIS in the future and be positioned to develop strategies to meet emerging conditions (i.e., GIS mapping, phone based e-mail systems, etc.).

Longer-term (Years 4 and 5)

1. Combine Checkinnovascotia.com and Novascotia.com, and provide an opportunity for on-line customer feedback on visitor information services.
2. Introduce a C D ROM version of the Doers'& Dreamers' Guide and other visitor servicing literature for visitors.
3. Research partnership opportunities with wireless application service providers.
4. Monitor emerging technology for applications (i.e., cars with built-in computers) that may have an impact on future VIS strategies.

Strategic Objective #2: Sustainable Visitor Service Programs

Combine all primary and secondary components of existing visitor information services into a cohesive, **twelve-month visitor information services program** such that each component continues to function effectively but is integrated with the overall objective of providing critical information that meets the needs of our target markets.

Short-term (Year 1)

1. Establish a VIS implementation committee, orient the entire industry to the plan, establish the standard operating procedures necessary for a successful roll-out, and prepare for the intermediate activity scheduled for years two and three.
2. Establish a Check In Advisory Board and conduct a periodic review from both a visitor's and an operator's perspective.
3. Move Kiosk program from "Sales and Partnerships" to "Marketing - Visitor Information Services".
4. Review and revamp all existing VIS programs (i.e., Fair and Friendly) where appropriate.
5. Improve the awareness of all VIS including the provincial web-site and the toll-free number.
6. Develop a Tourism Awareness Campaign to educate and inform the industry and government as well as the visitors. The campaign would be designed to ensure all players understand the value and opportunities which are involved in quality service to our visitors and to fully realize our potential.
7. Coordinate a study tour / best practices tour to a destination that is a recognized leader is visitor servicing. On an ongoing basis, regularly monitor best practices of other jurisdictions.

Intermediate term (Years 2 and 3)

1. Utilize the Doers' and Dreamers' Guide to illustrate the VIS "program" that is available for the use by the visitor to enhance their travel experiences.
2. Ensure there is a twelve-month focus on the promotion and availability of visitor information services for Nova Scotia.
3. Encourage innovative partnerships and opportunities to strengthen VIC operations, reduce reliance on government-sponsored programs, and encourage innovative revenue-generating ideas.
4. Facilitate a joint visitor information services seminar annually (TIANS Conference) to evaluate the coordination of all visitor information services partners.
5. Review and build toward high quality regional literature that is customer focused then promote greater use of regional tourist guides and other guides.
6. Develop a Kiosk operational manual for venue operators.

Longer-term (Years 4 and 5)

1. Provide an annual review of all methods of literature distribution.
2. Evaluate visitor exit surveys from a VIS perspective and a frequency perspective.

Strategic Objective #3: A Commitment to Effective Human Resource Management

Ensure complementary Human Resource Management strategies are designed and implemented, resulting in an effective and efficient level of service as demanded by the target markets of the Tourism Industry of Nova Scotia.

Short-term (Year 1)

1. Incorporate and/or develop training tools based on national standards, to ensure a highly skilled staff with comprehensive product knowledge capable of encouraging longer stays and repeat business.
2. Develop a "sales culture" in all visitor servicing staff such that counselors are providing specific recommendations based on visitors needs and wants where requested, rather than just providing general information.
3. Enhance and develop product knowledge training to ensure provincial perspective.
4. Ensure the Department of Tourism and Culture allocates the resources required to manage the VIS Strategy as a critical component of the Provincial marketing plan.
5. As part of the fee for service agreement with the Department of Tourism and Culture, all RTIAs must ensure VIC staff receive required training (provincially or RTIA administered).

Intermediate term (Years 2 and 3)

1. Incorporate measurable training benchmarks as part of the Award of Quality Program.
2. Establish Benchmarks for Certification at each VIC Service Level.
3. Implement provincial product knowledge training as a mandatory component of annual orientation for VIC staff.

4. Ensure on-going development of a sales focus in VIS.
5. Develop a strategy to address management and supervisory training for the VIC supervisors, that would work toward Certification.
6. Develop evaluation methodologies capable of bench marking visitor satisfaction with the province's Visitor Information Services programs.
7. Develop a training kit for every VIC that would provide resources for ongoing professional development of staff (HR practices, OHS , trainers' guides, etc.)

Longer-term (Years 4 and 5)

1. Implement training kits for all NS visitor servicing.
2. Provide access to on-line training resources.
3. Establish remuneration policies for travel counselors.
4. Promote the value of human resource investment in all visitor services.
5. Promote the value of language training within the educational community.

Strategic Objective #4: Visitor Information Centres

Develop an effective and efficient network of Visitor Information Centres capable of providing a regional as well as a provincial perspective, offering varying levels of service, strategically located throughout the province. Individual VICs and Tourism Associations should be encouraged to focus on quality and availability of service versus quantity of services.

In moving forward with the industry's Vision for Tourism, the role of visitor information services and the visitor centres needs to be more fully developed. The Department of Tourism and Culture and the VIS Committee will work with RTIAs and industry groups toward this goal.

Short-term (Year 1)

1. Develop a credible methodology for statistics gathering and VIC auditing for formula calculation purposes.
2. Request a transfer of authority for the PEP funds from the Office of Economic Development to the Department of Tourism and Culture. Once transferred, this fund will then be called the "Visitor Information Centre Employment Program."
3. Develop and introduce standard operating procedures for VIC evaluation purposes.
4. Review and revamp the Award of Quality Program to ensure it can dependably maintain minimum standards at all times, and encourage continual improvement.

Intermediate term (Years 2 and 3)

1. Develop a policy ensuring that any locally operated VIC that is located in a provincial VIC and receives PEP funding must contribute to operational costs of the building.
2. Develop and implement a service level approach to VIC classification based upon a mix of services and amenities.
3. Invest in counselors' up-sell training and general awareness from a provincial perspective.
4. Implement the revised Award of Quality Program.
5. Monitor all kiosk locations to ensure effectiveness is evaluated annually.
6. Ensure an effective promotional campaign is implemented to inform visitors of the services provided (i.e., print, signage, etc.).
7. Provide a modified kiosk program specific to rest areas during non-staffed periods, and pursue a tourism component within the rest area criteria, equivalent to Intermediate Service Level.
8. Review the policy of private sector literature distribution to all VICs and incorporate enhancements that will provide an improved return on investment.
9. Expand the availability of computers and Internet access for the visitor's use.
10. Establish a VIC satisfaction survey process and standards to monitor the process.
11. Promote, where justified, year-round VIC services in strategic areas of the province and encourage season extension in major centres and key entry points.
12. Enhance the availability and access to multilingual services at VICs.

Longer-term (Years 4 and 5)

1. Support establishing / relocating VICs to more strategic locations (i.e., 100-series highways).
2. Establish "best practices procedures" and other VIC management "standard operating procedures" to ensure a consistent and complementary network of services.
3. Investigate consolidation of VICs in communities that have two VICs not housed in the same building.

Guides in the Series

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Commercial or Community Attraction

A Guide to Starting & Operating
an Adventure Tourism Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Retail Tourism Business

A Guide to Community Tourism Planning

A Guide to Starting & Operating
an Accommodation Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Campground Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Restaurant Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Local Sightseeing Tour Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Receptive Tour Operator Business

A Guide to Starting & Operating
a Local Visitor Information Centre

A Guide to Planning & Hosting
a Community Festival or Event

A Guide to Marketing Your
Nova Scotia Tourism Business

Guides are available by visiting
www.gov.ns.ca/dtc/tourism/tourism_devguides.asp

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